The Human Comedy

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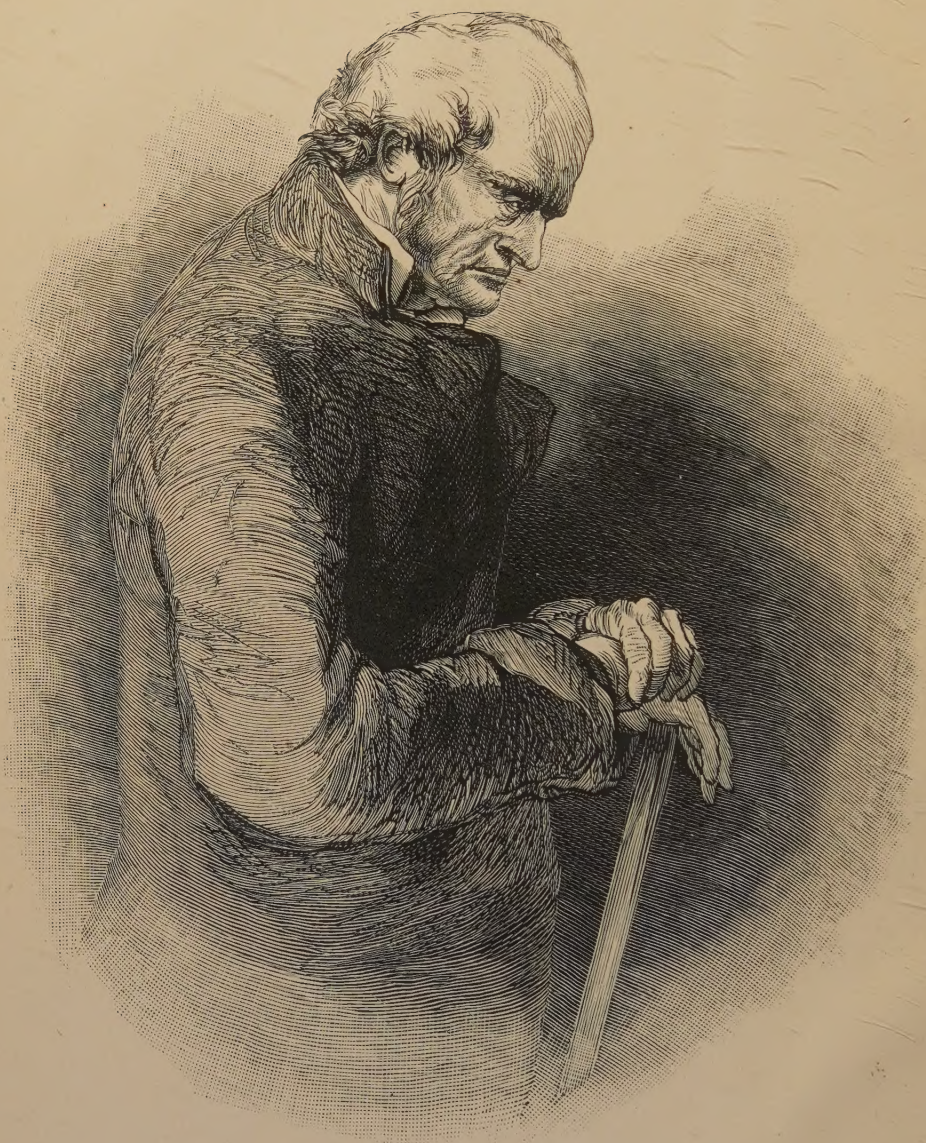

NISERON.

"There never was a more honest man."

THE

HUMAN COMEDY

BEING THE BEST NOVELS FROM THE
"COMÉDIE HUMAINE" OF

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

AN EPISODE UNDER THE TERROR
MADAME DE DEY'S LAST RECEPTION
DOOMED TO LIVE
THE CHOUANS
A PASSION IN THE DESERT
A TRAGEDY OF THE PEASANTRY

ILLUSTRATED WITH SIXTEEN ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD FROM THE BEST FRENCH EDITION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION DESCRIPTIVE OF THE AUTHOR'S STUPENDOUS AND BRILLIANT WORK

BY

JULIUS CHAMBERS

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME THREE

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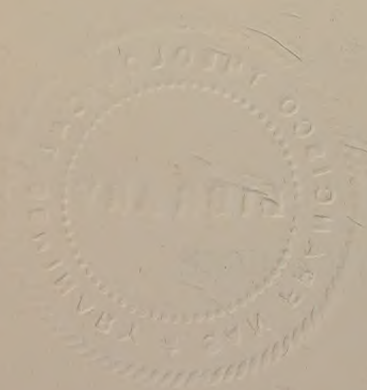

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SCENES IN POLITICAL LIFE.

I.

AN EPISODE UNDER THE TERROR.

On the 22d of January, 1793, about eight o'clock in the evening, an old lady was walking down the steep incline which ends in front of the church of Saint Laurent in Paris. It had snowed so hard all day that her footsteps were scarcely audible. The streets were deserted, and the feeling of fear which silence naturally inspires was increased by the remembrance of the terror under which France then groaned. The old lady had met no one on the way, and her eyesight, which had long been failing, did not allow of her distinguishing in the lamplight the few passers-by, scattered here and there like shadows along the immense vista of the faubourg. She went on bravely alone through the solitude, as if her age were a talisman to preserve her from all harm. When she had passed the Rue des Morts, she thought she could distinguish the firm heavy tread of a man walking behind her. She fancied it was not the first time that she had heard the sound. She was afraid, thinking that she was being followed, so she tried to walk faster than before, in order to reach a shop window in which the lights were bright enough for her to test the truth of her suspicions. As soon as she found herself in the gleam of light which streamed out horizontally from the shop, she turned her head suddenly and perceived a human form in the mist. This indistinct glimpse was enough; a feeling of terror fell upon her; she tottered for a moment under it, for now she felt certain that this stranger had accompanied her from the first step she had taken outside her own house. Her desire to escape from this spy gave her strength; incapable of reasoning, she walked twice as fast as before, as though it were possible for her to distance a man necessarily much more active than she. After running for some minutes she reached a pastry-cook's shop, went in and fell, rather than sat down, on a chair which was standing before the counter. As her hand rattled upon the latch a young woman seated at her embroidery raised her eyes from her work, looked through the square pane of glass, and recognized the old-fashioned violet silk mantle which enveloped the old lady; then she hurriedly opened a drawer, as if to take out something that she had been keeping there for her. Not only did this movement and the expression of the young woman's face betray her desire to get rid of the stranger as soon as possible, as a person whom she did not want to see, but she even let a gesture of impatience escape her when she found the drawer empty. Then, without looking at the lady, she went out hastily from behind the counter into the back part of the shop and called her husband; he appeared at once.

"Wherever have you put ——?" she asked, mysteriously, glancing in the direction of the old lady, and not finishing the sentence.

The pastry-cook could only see the old lady's head-dress, a huge black bonnet, trimmed with violet ribbons, but he looked

at his wife as much as to say, "Do you think I should leave a thing like that in your counter?" and disappeared. His wife, surprised that the old lady sat so still and silent, went close up to her; when she saw her she was seized with a feeling of compassion, and perhaps of curiosity too. Although the old lady's face was naturally pallid, like the face of a person who practices austerities in secret, it was easy to see that some recent emotion had rendered it even more pallid than usual. Her head-dress was so arranged as to hide her hair, which was white, no doubt from age, for it was evident that she did not wear powder, as there was no sign of it upon the collar of her dress. This absence of ornament gave her face a look of religious severity. Her features were proud and grave. In former times the manners and habits of people of rank were so different from those of the other classes, that it was easy then to distinguish a noble. Thus the young woman felt sure that the strange lady was a *ci-devant,* who had at one time been attached to the court.

"Madame?" said she involuntarily, forgetting, in the respect she inspired, that the title was proscribed.

The old lady made no answer, she kept her eyes fixed on the shop window, as if some terrible object were depicted on the glass.

"What is the matter, *citoyenne?*" asked the shopman, returning at that moment.

The worthy pastry-cook awoke the lady from her reverie, by handing her a small cardboard box, wrapped up in blue paper.

"Nothing, nothing, my friends," said she in a gentle voice.

She raised her eyes to the pastry-cook, as if to thank him by a look, but seeing a red cap upon his head, she cried aloud—

"Ah! you have betrayed me!"

The young woman and her husband answered with a gesture of horror; the stranger blushed, either with relief, or with regret at having suspected them.

"Forgive me!" she said at once, with childish sweetness. Then she drew a gold louis out of her pocket and gave it to the pastry-cook. "That is the price we agreed upon," said she. There is a state of want recognized instinctively by those in want themselves. The pastry-cook and his wife looked at one another, interchanging the same thought as they glanced at the old lady. The louis was evidently her last. Her hands trembled as she held out the coin to them, she looked at it sorrowfully, but without grudging, though she seemed to be conscious of the full extent of the sacrifice. Hunger and misery were engraved upon her face in as legible characters as her ascetic habits and her present fear. Her clothes still bore the traces of past richness. She was dressed in faded silk, with carefully mended lace, and an elegant though worn mantle—in fact, the rags of former wealth. The shop-keepers, wavering between pity and self-interest, tried to soothe their conscience with words.

"*Citoyenne,* you seem very poorly."

"Would madame like to take anything?" asked the woman, catching up her husband's words.

"We've got some very good broth," said the pastry-cook.

"It's so cold, perhaps you have caught a chill, madame, coming here; you are welcome to rest a bit and warm yourself."

"We are not so black as the devil," said the pastry-cook.

Reassured by the friendly tone of the charitable pastry-cook, the lady admitted that she had been followed by a man, and was afraid to go home alone.

"Is that all?" replied the man with the red cap. "Wait a minute for *me, citoyenne.*"

He gave the louis to his wife; then, moved by that sense of acknowledgment which steals into the heart of a vendor who has received an exorbitant price for goods of slight value, he went and put on his uniform as a *garde national,* took his hat and sword, and returned under arms. But his wife had had time to reflect. As in many other hearts, reflection closed the hand which benevolence had opened. The woman had got frightened; she was afraid her husband would get into some

scrape, so she plucked at the lappet of his coat to detain him. However, in obedience to an instinct of charity, the good man offered on the spot to escort the old lady.

"It looks as if the man whom the *citoyenne* is afraid of were still prowling round the shop," said the young woman sharply.

"I am afraid he is," frankly admitted the lady.

"Suppose it were a spy? or perhaps there is a conspiracy! Do not go—and take the box away from her."

These words were whispered into the pastry-cook's ear by his wife; they froze the extempore courage which had inflated his breast.

"Eh! I'll just go and say a word to him, and he'll be off in a minute," he exclaimed, opening the door and going out precipitately.

The old lady sat down again on her chair as passive as a child; she looked almost silly. The honest shopman speedily returned; his face, red enough to begin with, and further inflamed by the fire of his oven, had suddenly become livid; he was so overcome with terror that his legs tottered under him, and his eyes looked like a drunkard's.

"D'you want to get our heads cut off, wretched aristocrat!" he cried, furious. "Come, take to your heels, and don't ever show yourself here again. Don't expect me to furnish you with the elements of conspiracy!"

As the pastry-cook finished these words, he tried to snatch back the little box, which the old lady had put into one of her pockets. But scarcely had the impudent fellow's hands touched her clothes, when the strange lady—preferring to face the dangers of her walk unprotected save by God, rather than lose what she had just purchased—regained all the agility of her youth; she sprang to the door, opened it suddenly, and vanished from the gaze of the pastry-cook and his wife, leaving them trembling and stupefied. As soon as she found herself outside, she set off at a quick walk; but her strength soon failed her, for she heard the heavy footsteps of the spy who was following her so pitilessly, crunching the snow behind her. She was obliged to stop; he stopped too. Whether from fear or lack of intelligence, she did not dare either to speak or to look at him. She went on, walking slowly; then the man slackened his steps, always keeping at a distance from which he was able to watch her. The stranger seemed to be the very shadow of the old woman. Nine o'clock struck as this silent pair passed again before the church of Saint Laurent. It is in the nature of every heart, even the feeblest, that a feeling of calmness should succeed to violent agitation, for, if feeling is infinite, our organization is limited. So the strange woman, as she experienced no harm from her supposed persecutor, was inclined to look upon him as an unknown friend anxious to protect her. She summed up all the circumstances attendant on the apparitions of the stranger with a view to discover plausible corroboration of this consoling theory; she was bent on finding out good intentions in him rather than evil. Forgetting the terror with which he had inspired the pastry-cook just before, she passed on with a firm step through the higher parts of le faubourg Saint Martin. After walking for half an hour, she reached a house situated at the corner formed by the principal street of the faubourg and the street which leads to la barrière de Pantin. Even now this is still one of the loneliest places in the whole of Paris. The north wind blows over les buttes de Saint Chaumont and de Belleville, and whistles through the houses—or rather hovels, sprinkled over a nearly deserted valley, divided by walls of mud and bones.

This desolate spot seemed the natural refuge of misery and despair. The man, implacable in his pursuit of this poor creature, who was yet bold enough to traverse those silent streets by night, seemed impressed by the scene that rose before him. He stopped to consider, standing upright in an attitude of hesitation. A lamp, whose flickering flame could scarcely penetrate the mist, cast its faint light upon him. Fright gave the old woman eyes.

She thought she could descry a sinister look upon the man's features. She felt her fears reawakening—then, taking advantage of a sort of uncertainty which seemed to make him linger, she glided through the darkness to the door of the solitary house, touched a spring, and was gone swift as a dream. The man stood motionless looking at the house. In a certain measure it might have served for the type of the wretched dwellings of this faubourg. The crazy cabin was built of ashlar smeared with a coat of plaster, so rotten and with such big cracks that it looked as if the least puff of wind would blow the whole thing down. The roof, covered with brown moss-grown tiles, had sunk in several places, and seemed on the point of falling in under the weight of the snow. There were three windows in each story, the frames mouldering with damp and starting with the action of the sun; it was evident that the cold must find its way through them into the rooms. The house was as isolated as an ancient tower that time has forgotten to destroy. The attics at the top of the wretched building were pierced with windows at irregular intervals, and from these shone a dim light, but the rest of the house was in complete darkness. The old woman had some difficulty in climbing the rough awkward staircase, up which a rope served for a handrail. She knocked mysteriously at the door of a lodging in the attic; an old man offered her a chair; she sat down in it precipitately.

"Hide! hide!" said she. "Though we only go out so seldom, they know everything we do, and spy out every step we take."

"What is it now?" asked another old woman who was sitting by the fire.

"That man who has been prowling round the house since yesterday morning has been following me this evening."

At these words the three inhabitants of the garret looked at each other; they did not try to conceal the signs of profound terror visible on their faces. The old man was the least agitated of the three, perhaps because he was in the most danger. A brave man, under the burden of great misfortune, or under the yoke of persecution, has already—so to speak—begun his self-sacrifice; he looks upon each day of his life only as one more victory gained over fate. It was easy to see from the looks of the two women which were fastened on the old man, that he and he alone was the object of their intense anxiety.

"Why should we cease to trust in God, sisters?" said he in a hollow voice, but with much earnestness; "we sang His praises amid the shouts of the murderers and the cries of the dying in the Carmelite convent; if He willed that I should be saved from the massacre, it was doubtless to preserve me for a destiny that I must endure without murmuring. God protects His own, He can dispose of them according to His will. It is you we must take thought for, not for me."

"No," said one of the two old women, "what is *our* life compared with the life of a priest?"

"When I was once outside the Abbaye de Chelles I looked upon myself as dead," exclaimed that one of the two nuns who had not been out.

"Look," said the one who had just come in, "here are the Hosts."

"But," exclaimed the other, "I can hear some one coming up the stairs."

At these words they all three listened; the noise ceased.

"Do not be alarmed," said the priest, "if some one tries to find you. Some one, on whose fidelity we can count, was to take all necessary steps for crossing the frontier, and will come for letters which I have written to le Duc de Langeais and le Marquis de Beauséant, asking them to consider means for rescuing you from this terrible country, and the death or misery which await you here."

"But will you not follow us?" whispered the two nuns eagerly, with a sort of despair.

"My place is where there are victims," said the priest simply.

The women looked at their guest in silence, with holy admiration.

"Sœur Marthe," said he, addressing the sister who had gone out for the Hosts,

"this messenger will answer *Fiat voluntas* to the word *Hosanna.*"

"There *is* some one on the stairs!" exclaimed the other nun, opening a hiding place contrived under the roof.

This time, in the profound silence, they could easily hear the steps, which were covered with lumps of dried mud, creaking under the tread of a man. The priest squeezed with difficulty into a sort of wardrobe, and the nun threw some clothes over him. "You can shut the door, Sœur Agathe," said he in a muffled voice.

He was scarcely hidden when there were three raps at the door. The two holy women trembled; they took counsel by looks, not daring to pronounce a single word. They appeared to be both about sixty years old. Cut off from the world for forty years, they were like plants accustomed to the atmosphere of a greenhouse, which die if they are put out of it. They were so habituated to convent life that they could not conceive any other. One morning their gratings had been broken down, and they had shuddered at finding themselves free. It is easy to picture the sort of unnatural numbness that the events of the Revolution had produced in their innocent hearts. Incapable of reconciling their monastic ideas with the difficulties of life, they could not even understand their own situation; they were like children who have been once cared for and then abandoned by their special providence—their mother, praying instead of crying. Thus in the face of the danger they foresaw at this moment, they remained mute and passive, knowing no other defense than Christian resignation. The man who had asked for admittance interpreted their silence as consent; he opened the door at once and presented himself. The two nuns shuddered when they recognized him as the person who had been prowling round their house for some time past, collecting information about them. They sat motionless, looking at him with apprehensive curiosity, like a shy child silently staring at a stranger. The man was stout and of lofty statue; there was nothing in his bearing, his manner, or his physiognomy suggestive of an evil nature. He imitated the stillness of the nuns, while his eyes slowly examined the room he had just entered.

Two straw mats, placed on the bare boards, served as beds for the two nuns; there was only one table, in the middle of the room; on it stood some plates, three knives, and a round loaf; a small fire burned in the grate; some pieces of wood piled up in a corner bore further witness to the poverty of the two recluses. The walls were covered with a layer of very old paint, showing the bad condition of the roof by the stains upon it, which marked with brown streams the infiltration of the rain. A relic, no doubt rescued from the pillage of the Abbaye de Chelles, was placed like an ornament upon the mantelpiece. Three chairs, two chests, and a wretched cupboard completed the furniture of the room, but a door near the fireplace suggested that there might be a second.

The person, who had introduced himself under such terrible auspices into the bosom of this family, did not take long to make an inventory of their cell. His features assumed an expression of pity as he cast a look of benevolence upon the two women; he was at least as embarrassed as they. The strange silence which they all three kept did not last long, for presently the stranger began to comprehend the moral feebleness and inexperience of the two poor creatures, so he said to them in a voice which he tried to make gentle: "I am not come to you as an enemy, *citoyennes*—" He stopped short, and then went on: "*Mes sœurs,* if any misfortune should happen to you, believe me it is not I who will have contributed to it. I have a favor to ask of you."

They still kept silence.

"If I intrude upon you—if I annoy you, tell me so freely—I will leave you; but I hope you will understand that I am entirely devoted to you; that if there is any service I could render you, you may command me without fear, for I alone perhaps —now that there is no king—am above the law."

There was a ring of truth in his words. Sister Agathe, the nun who belonged to the family of Langeais, and whose manners seemed to show that she had formerly been familiar with brilliant society and had breathed the air of a court, hastened to point to a chair, as if to invite their visitor to sit down. The stranger showed a sort of pleasure mingled with sadness, when he saw this gesture; then he waited to sit down until the two worthy ladies had done so themselves

"You have given refuge," he went on, "to a venerable priest who has not taken the oaths, who escaped miraculously from the massacre of the Carmelites."

"*Hosanna!*" said Sister Agathe, interrupting him, and looking at him with nervous curiosity.

"No, I do not think that is his name," he replied.

"But, monsieur," said Sister Marthe eagerly, "we have not got any priest here; and—"

"Then you should have been more prudent and wary," answered the stranger, stretching out his hand and taking a breviary from the table. "I do not think that you are likely to know Latin, and—"

He did not go on; the extraordinary emotion expressed by the faces of the poor nuns made him afraid he had gone too far; they trembled, and their eyes filled with tears.

"Do not distress yourselves," he said frankly. "I know the name of your guest and your own; three days ago I learned all about your distress, and your devotion to the venerable Abbé de—"

"Sh!" said Sister Agathe simply, putting her finger to her lips.

"You see, *mes sœurs*, that if I had conceived the horrible plan of betraying you, I might have already accomplished it more than once."

When the priest heard these words, he extricated himself from his prison, and appeared in the middle of the room.

"I cannot believe, monsieur," said he to the strange man, "that you are one of our persecutors; I trust myself to you. What is it that you want of me?"

The holy confidence of the priest, the noble fervor expressed in all his features, would have disarmed a murderer. The mysterious person who had thus brought excitement into this scene of misery and resignation, sat for a moment looking at the group of the three before him; then, assuming a confidential tone, he addressed the priest thus: "*Mon père*, I came to entreat you to celebrate a requiem mass for the repose of the soul of—of a—of a consecrated person whose body will never rest in hallowed ground."

The priest shuddered involuntarily. The two nuns, not yet comprehending to whom the stranger referred, remained in an attitude of curiosity, their necks stretched out and their faces turned to the two speakers. The ecclesiastic scrutinized the man: genuine anxiety was visible in his face, and his eyes expressed ardent supplication.

"*Eh bien!* Come back to-night, at midnight; I shall be ready to celebrate the only funeral office we can offer in expiation of the crime of which you speak."

The stranger trembled, but he looked as if some feeling of satisfaction, at once solemn and sweet, had triumphed over some secret sorrow. After respectfully saluting the priest and the two holy women, he departed with an expression of mute gratitude understood by these three generous hearts. About two hours after this scene, he returned, knocked cautiously at the outer door of the attic, and was received by Mademoiselle de Beauséant, and led into the second room of their humble retreat. Here all had been prepared for the ceremony. Between the two pillars of the chimney-piece the nuns had pushed up the old cupboard; its antique shape was hidden under a magnificent altar frontal of green *moire*. A large ebony and ivory crucifix was fastened to the yellow wall, making the bareness only more apparent, and of necessity attracting the eye to itself. The sisters had managed to set up four little slender tapers upon this temporary altar, by fastening them to it with sealing-wax. The tapers cast a pale light, almost absorbed by the dead walls, their feeble flicker

scarcely reaching the rest of the room; it cast its beams only upon the Holy Instruments, as it were, a ray of light falling from heaven upon the naked altar. The floor was reeking with damp. The roof sloped rapidly on both sides like the roof of the other garret, and was scored with cracks through which came the icy blast. Nothing could have been less stately, yet nothing was more solemn than this mournful ceremony. Profound silence, through which the least sound arising from la route d'Allemagne could be heard, cast a veil of somber majesty over the midnight scene. Indeed the grandeur of the action contrasted strongly with the poverty of the instruments; therefrom arose a feeling of religious awe. On each side of the altar, regardless of the deadly damp, knelt the two aged nuns upon the tiling of the floor, and prayed together with the priest. Clad in his sacrificial vestments, he set out a golden chalice adorned with precious stones, no doubt one of the sacred vessels saved from the pillage of the Abbaye de Chelles. By the side of this ciborium, recalling by its richness the splendor of the monarchy, were placed two glasses, scarcely good enough for the lowest inn, containing the water and the wine for the Holy Sacrifice. For want of a missal the priest had placed his breviary upon the corner of the altar. A common towel was put ready for the washing of the innocent and bloodless hands. The whole was infinite yet little; poor but noble; at once holy and profane. The stranger came and knelt down devoutly between the two nuns. The priest had tied a piece of crape round the chalice and the crucifix; having no other means of showing the intention of this requiem mass, he had put God Himself into mourning weeds. Suddenly the man noticed it; he was seized with a memory that held such power over him, that the sweat stood in drops upon his wide and lofty brow.

The four silent actors of this scene looked at one another mysteriously. Then their souls rising with one another in their mutual influence, communicated one to another their own sensations, and were melted together in religious pity. It seemed as if their thought had called up the martyr whose remains had been devoured by quick-lime, and that his shadow rose before them in all its royal majesty. They were celebrating an *obit* without the body of the dead. Under these gaping laths and tiles, four Christians were about to intercede before God for a king of France, were about to celebrate his funeral without the coffin. Here was the purest of all devotion, an astonishing act of fidelity performed without one thought for the future. Doubtless to the eyes of God, it was as the glass of water which weighs in the balance as heavy as the greatest virtues. The whole monarchy was present in the prayers of a priest and two poor women; perhaps, too, the Revolution itself was represented in the man, for his face betrayed too much remorse not to cause the belief that he was fulfilling the vows of a boundless repentance.

Instead of pronouncing the Latin words, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, etc., the priest, by some divine inspiration, looked upon the three assistants—the symbol there of Christian France—and said to them, as though to blot out the wretchedness of the garret: "We are about to enter into the sanctuary of God!" At these words, uttered with thrilling earnestness, the server and the two nuns were filled with religious awe. God would not have revealed Himself in greater majesty under the vaults of Saint Peter at Rome, than He revealed Himself then to the eyes of these Christians in this refuge of poverty. The truth is so perfect—that between Him and man every intermediary seems useless, and that He draws His greatness only from Himself. The stranger's devotion was real, the sentiment, too, which united the prayers of these four servants of God and the king was unanimous. The holy words rang through the silence like heavenly music. There was a moment when the stranger was overcome with tears; it was at the *Pater Noster*. The priest added, in Latin, this petition, which the man no doubt understood: *Et remitte*

scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse. (And forgive the regicides as Louis himself forgave them.) The two nuns saw two great tears roll down the stranger's manly cheeks and fall upon the floor. The priest recited the Office for the Dead. The *Domine salvum fac regem,* intoned in a low voice, went to the hearts of the faithful Royalists when they remembered that the child-king, for whom their prayers ascended to the Most High, at that moment was a captive in the hands of his enemies. The stranger shivered at the thought that a new crime might still be committed, wherein he would no doubt be forced to take part. When the funeral service was over, the priest made a sign to the two nuns, and they went out. As soon as he found himself alone with the stranger, he went up to him with a sad and gentle air, and said in a fatherly voice: "My son, if you have stained your hands in the blood of the martyr-king, confide in me. There is no sin which cannot be effaced in the eyes of God, by repentance as touching and sincere as yours seems to be." At the first words pronounced by the ecclesiastic, the stranger let a movement of involuntary terror escape him; but his face recovered its calmness and he looked at the astonished priest with confidence.

"Father," said he, in a voice visibly affected, "no one is more innocent than I of the blood shed—"

"I must believe you," interrupted the priest.

He paused while he once more scrutinized his penitent; then, persisting in the belief that he was one of those timorous *Conventionnels* who betrayed an inviolable and consecrated head in order to save their own, he replied in a grave voice: "Consider, my son, the fact that you have not co-operated in so great a crime is not sufficient to be absolved from it. Those men who were able to defend the king, and left their swords in their scabbards, will have a very heavy account to render to the King of Heaven. Oh! yes," continued the old priest, shaking his head impressively from right to left—"yes, very heavy!—for by remaining aloof, they became the passive accomplices of this terrible crime."

"You think," asked the stranger in amazement, "that indirect participation will be punished. The soldier commanded to fall into line—is he then responsible?"

The priest hesitated.

The stranger was glad of the embarrassment into which he had thrown this Puritan Royalist, by placing him between the dogma of passive obedience—which, according to the Monarchists, was the essence of all military law — and the equally important dogma which magnifies into sanctity the respect due to the royal person; in the priest's silence he eagerly descried a solution to the doubts which tormented him. Then, in order not to leave the venerable *Jansenist* time for further reflection, he said to him: "I should blush to offer you any fee for the funeral service you have just celebrated for the repose of the king's soul and the relief of my conscience; one cannot pay for a thing of inestimable value except by an offering also above price. Will you deign, monsieur, to accept the gift of a holy relic which I offer you. The day will come, perhaps, when you will understand its value."

As the stranger finished these words he presented the ecclesiastic with a little box, which felt extremely light. He took it, as it were, unconsciously, for the man's solemn words, the tone in which he spoke, and the respect with which he held out the box, struck him with the profoundest astonishment. Then they returned into the room where the two nuns were waiting.

"You are in a house," said the stranger, "belonging to a man—Mucius Scaevola, the plasterer who lives on the first floor—who is well known in the section for his patriotism; but he is secretly attached to the Bourbons. He was formerly huntsman to Monseigneur le Prince de Conti, and owes all his fortune to him. As long as you do not go out of his house, you are safer here than in any other place in France. Stay here; there are pious souls who will watch over your wants, and you will be able to wait, with-

out danger, for less evil times. In a year, on the 21st of January"—(as he pronounced these last words he could not hide an involuntary shudder)—"if you do adopt this wretched place for your refuge, I will return to celebrate the expiatory mass with you—"

He did not finish his sentence. Then, saluting the silent inhabitants of the attic, he cast a last look on all the signs of their poverty, and disappeared.

For the two innocent nuns, such an adventure assumed all the interest of a romance. As soon, then, as the venerable abbé had informed them of the mysterious gift which the man had made him so solemnly, they placed the box on the table, and their three anxious faces, faintly lit up by the light of a tallow dip, betrayed an indescribable curiosity. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box, and found a very fine *batiste* handkerchief, soiled with sweat; when they unfolded it they found that there were stains upon it.

"It is blood!" said the priest.

"It is marked with the royal crown!" exclaimed the other sister.

The two nuns dropped the precious relic in horror. For these two simple souls the mystery which enveloped the stranger became inexplicable; as to the priest, from that day he did not even attempt to account for it.

The three prisoners soon perceived, in spite of the Terror, that a powerful hand was stretched out over them. First, they received provisions and fuel; then, the two nuns discovered that there must be a woman co-operating with their protector, for linen and clothes were sent them which enabled them to go out without exciting remark by the aristocratic fashion of the dresses which they had been obliged to continue to wear; finally Mucius Scaevola gave them two *cartes civiques*. From time to time warnings necessary to the safety of the priest reached them in roundabout ways. These counsels came so opportunely that they were convinced they could only have been given by a person initiated into secrets of State. In spite of the famine which weighed over Paris, these outlaws found rations of white bread regularly brought to the door of their cabin by invisible hands; however, they thought they had discovered in Mucius Scaevola the mysterious agent of these benefactions, which were always both suitably timed and ingeniously carried out. The three nobles then, who continued to dwell in the same attic, could not doubt that their protector was the person who had come to celebrate the mass of expiation during the night of the 22d of January, 1793; thus he became the object of their special devotion; he was their only hope, they lived through him alone. They had added to their prayers special prayers for him; night and morning the pious creatures offered their vows for his happiness, prosperity, and safety; they besought God to keep far from him every snare, to deliver him from his enemies and grant him a long and peaceful life. To their gratitude, renewed so to speak every day, was necessarily allied a feeling of curiosity which grew each day more intense. The circumstances that had attended the stranger's apparition were the subject of their conversations; they formed a thousand conjectures concerning him; even the mere distraction of thought which he caused was a fresh source of advantage to them. They promised themselves to make sure of not letting him escape from their gratitude the evening when he would come back according to his promise, to celebrate the sad anniversary of the death of Louis XVI. That night, so impatiently awaited, arrived at last. At midnight, the sound of the stranger's heavy footsteps was heard upon the old wooden staircase; the room had been prepared to receive him, the altar was vested. This time the sisters opened the door to greet him, and both hastened to the stairs with a light. Mademoiselle de Langeais even went a few steps down in order to see their benefactor the sooner.

"Come," she said kindly, in a voice broken by emotion—"come, we were expecting you."

The man raised his head, cast a somber look at the nun, and made no answer.

She felt as if a mantle of ice had fallen upon her; she was silent. Gratitude and curiosity expired in their hearts at the sight of him. Perhaps he seemed to them, whose hearts were excited by sentiment and disposed to expand into friendship, more chilling, taciturn, and terrible than he really was. The three poor prisoners comprehended that he desired to remain a stranger to them, and resigned themselves. The priest fancied he saw a smile upon the man's lips at the moment when he perceived the preparation that they had made for his reception; but he immediately repressed it. He heard mass and prayed, then he departed, after having replied with a few polite words of refusal to Mademoiselle de Langeais's invitation to partake of the little collation which they had prepared.

After the 9th of *thermidor*, the nuns and the Abbé de Marolles were able to walk through Paris without the least risk. The first expedition which the abbé made was to a perfumery shop, at the sign of *La Reine des fleurs*, kept by a *citoyen* and *citoyenne* Ragon, late perfumers to the court, who remained faithful to the royal family, and whom the Vendéans made use of to correspond with the princes and the royalist committee in Paris. The abbé, dressed as the times required, was just at the doorstep of this shop—which was situated between Saint Roch and la rue des Trondeurs—when a crowd that filled la rue Saint Honoré prevented his going out. "What's this?" said he to Madame Ragon.

"It is nothing," she replied; "only the tumbril and the executioner going to la Place Louis XV. Ah! we saw it often enough last year; but to-day, just four days after the anniversary of the twenty-first of January, one can look at the ghastly procession without any pain."

"Why," said the abbé, "what you say is not Christian."

"Ah! but it is the execution of Robespierre's accomplices. They defended themselves as long as they could, but now it's their turn—*over there*, where they have sent so many innocent men."

The crowd filled la rue Saint Honoré, and passed by like a flood. The Abbé de Marolles, yielding to an impulse of curiosity, looked, and saw above the heads of the crowd, standing erect on the tumbril, the man who had heard his mass three days before.

"Who is it?" said he; "the man—"

"It's the executioner," answered Monsieur Ragon, calling the *exécuteur des hautes œuvres* by his title under the monarchy.

"*Mon ami, mon ami!*" cried Madame Ragon; "Monsieur l'Abbé is dying!" and the old lady got a flask of vinegar to bring the priest to his senses, for he had fainted. "No doubt what he gave me," said he, "was the handkerchief with which the king wiped his face when he was going to his martyrdom.—Poor man! The ax had a heart in its steel when none was found in all France!"

The perfumers thought the poor priest was delirious.

II.

MADAME DE DEY'S LAST RECEPTION.*

"Sometimes they saw that by some phenomenon of Vision or Locomotion he could abolish Space in both its moods — Time and Distance — whereof the one is intellectual and the other physical."—LOUIS LAMBART.

ONE evening in the month of November, 1793, the principal inhabitants of Carentan were collected in the salon of Madame de Dey, who held an *Assembly* every evening. Certain circumstances which would have attracted no notice in a large town, but were such as to mightily interest a small one, imparted a peculiar importance to this customary gathering. Two days before, Madame de Dey had closed her doors to her visitors on the ground of indisposition, and had also announced that she would be unable to receive them the following evening. At an ordinary time these two events would have produced the same effect at Carentan as a *relache* at all the theaters produces in Paris; on these days, existence seems in a sense incomplete. But in 1793, the action of Madame de Dey was one which might lead to the most disastrous consequences. At that time, a step involving a noble in the least risk was nearly always a matter of life and death. In order to understand properly the keen curiosity and petty craftiness which on that evening animated the faces of all these respectable Normans; and still more, in order to share the secret perplexities of Madame de Dey, it is necessary to explain the part she played at Carentan. As the critical position in which she was situated at this time was no doubt the position of many during the Revolution, the sympathies of not a few of my readers will add their own color to this narrative.

Madame de Dey was the widow of a lieutenant-general decorated with several orders. At the beginning of the emigration she had left the court, and as she owned considerable property in the neighborhood of Carentan, she had taken refuge there in the hope that the influence of the terror would make itself but little felt in those parts. This supposition, founded on an exact knowledge of the country, proved correct, for the ravages of the Revolution in Lower Normandy were slight. Although, formerly, when she came to visit her property she had only associated with the local *noblesse*, now, out of policy, she opened her doors to the principal townspeople and the new authorities of Carentan, exerting herself to flatter them by the compliment of her acquaintance, and at the same time to avoid awakening their hatred or their jealousy. Kind and courteous, gifted with an indescribable sweetness of manner, she knew how to please without recourse to cringing or entreaty, and had thus succeeded in winning general esteem. This was due to her exquisite tact, which by its sage promptings enabled her to steer a difficult course and satisfy the exigencies of a mixed society; she neither humiliated the self-conceit of the parvenus nor shocked the sensibilities of her old friends.

At the age of about thirty-eight, she still persevered—not that fresh buxom beauty which distinguishes the girls of Lower Normandy—but a slender, so to speak, aristocratic type. Her features were delicately chiseled and her figure pliant and graceful; when she spoke, her pale face seemed to light up with fresh life. Her large dark eyes were full of kindly courtesy, but an expression of religious calm within them seemed to show

* "Le Réquisitionnaire" was included by Balzac among his Philosophical Studies, because of the supernaturnal feature.—EDITOR.

that the principle of her existence lay no longer in herself. She had been married at an early age to an old and jealous soldier, and the falseness of her position in the midst of a dissolute court, had no doubt done much to spread a veil of grave melancholy over a face which must once have beamed with all the charm and vivacity of love. Obliged to repress unceasingly the instinctive impulses and emotions of woman, at a time when she still feels rather than reflects, with her, passion had remained virgin in the depth of her heart. Thus her chief attraction was derived from this inward youthfulness, which betrayed itself at certain moments in her countenance, and gave her ideas an innocent expression of desire.

Her appearance commanded respect, but in her manner and her voice, impulses toward an unknown future, such as spring in the heart of a young girl, were continually showing themselves. The least susceptible men soon found themselves in love with her, and yet were impressed with a sort of fear of her, inspired by her courtly bearing. Her soul, great by nature but rendered strong by cruel struggles, seemed to be raised too high for common humanity, and of this men appeared to be conscious. To such a soul, a lofty passion is a necessity. Thus all Madame de Dey's affections were concentrated in one single sentiment—the sentiment of maternity. The happiness of which she had been deprived as a wife she found again in the intense love she bore her son. She loved him, not only with the pure and deep devotion of a mother, but with the coquetry of a sweetheart and the jealousy of a wife. She was miserable when he was far from her, anxious when he had gone out; she could never see enough of him; she lived only in him and for him. To give an idea of the strength of this sentiment in Madame de Dey, it will be enough to add that this son, besides being her only child, was the last relation left her, the only creature on whom she could fasten the hopes and fears and joys of her life. The late count was the last of his family, and the countess the sole heiress of hers, so that every worldly calculation and interest combined with the noblest needs of the soul to intensify in her heart a sentiment already so strong in the heart of woman. It was only by infinite care that she had succeeded in rearing her son, and this had endeared him still more to her. The doctor had pronounced twenty times over that she must lose him, but she was confident in her own hopes and presentiments. So in spite of the decrees of the faculty, she had the inexpressible joy of seeing him pass safely through the perils of infancy, and then of watching with wonder the continued improvement of his health.

Thanks to her constant care, her son had grown into a young man of so much promise that at the age of twenty he was looked upon as one of the most accomplished gentlemen at the court of Versailles. Above all, happy in a crown unattained by the efforts of every mother, she was adored by her son; they understood one another heart to heart in fraternal sympathy. If they had not been already bound together by the bonds of nature, they would have instinctively felt for each other that mutual friendship between men which is so rarely met with in life.

The young count had been appointed sub-lieutenant at the age of eighteen, and in obedience to the code of honor of the day had followed the princes in their emigration.

Thus it was impossible for Madame de Dey, being noble, rich, and the mother of an emigrant, to hide from herself the dangers of her cruel situation. With no other aim than to save her large fortuen for her son, she had given up the happiness of accompanying him; but when she read at Carentan the stringent laws under which the Republic was confiscating every day the property of emigrants, she exulted in her act of courage, for was she not preserving her son's wealth at the risk of her own life? Later on, when she heard of the terrible executions decreed by the Convention, she slept in peace, knowing that her only treasure was in safety, far from danger and the scaffold. She congratu-

lated herself in the belief that she had taken the best means of preserving both her treasures at once. By consecrating to this secret thought the concessions which those unhappy times demanded, she neither compromised her womanly dignity nor her aristocratic convictions, but hid her sorrows under a cold veil of mystery.

She had grasped all the difficulties which awaited her at Carentan. To come there and fill the first place was in itself a daily tempting of the scaffold. But supported by her motherly courage, she was enabled to win the affection of the poor by consoling the misery of all without distinction, and to make herself indispensable to the rich by ministering to their pleasures.

She entertained at her house the procureur of the commune, the mayor, the president of the district, the public prosecutor, and even the judges of the Revolutionary Court. Of these personages the first four were unmarried, and paid their addresses to her. Each of them hoped she would marry him, either from fear of the harm that it was in their power to do her, or for the sake of the protection which they had to offer her. The public prosecutor, formerly an attorney at Caen, employed to manage the countess's business, adopted an artifice which was most dangerous for her. He tried a generous and devoted line of conduct, in the hope of inspiring her with affection. In this way he was the most formidable of all her suitors, and as she had formerly been a client of his, he alone knew intimately the condition and extent of her fortune. His passion was therefore re-enforced by all the desires of avarice, and further supported by immense power—the power of life and death over the whole district. This man, who was still young, proceeded with so fine a show of generosity that Madame de Dey had not as yet been able to form a true estimate of him. But despite the danger of a trial of craft with Normans, she made use of all the inventive wit and duplicity bestowed by nature on women, to play off these rivals one against the other. By gaining time, she hoped to reach the end of her difficulties, safe and sound. At this period the Royalists of the interior went on flattering themselves from day to day that on the morrow they would see the end of the Republic; it was this persuasion which brought many of them to ruin.

In spite of these difficulties, by the exercise of considerable address, the countess had maintained her independence up to the day on which she had determined, with unaccountable imprudence, to close her doors to her guests. She inspired such a real and deep interest, that the people who had come to her house that evening were seriously perturbed when they heard it was impossible for her to receive them. Then, with that barefaced curiosity which is ingrained in provincial manners, they immediately began to make inquiries as to what trouble, or annoyance, or illness, she suffered from. To these questions an old housekeeper named Brigitte answered that her mistress kept her room and would see no one, not even the members of her household.

The semi-claustral life led by the inhabitants of a small town forms a habit of analyzing aud explaining the actions of others, so germane to them as to become invincible. So after having pitied Madame de Dey, without really knowing whether she was happy or unhappy, each one set himself to discover the cause of her sudden retirement.

"If she were ill," said the first inquisitor, "she would have sent for advice; but the doctor has been at my house the whole day playing chess. He was joking with me and saying that there is only one disease nowadays, . . . and the loss of one's head is incurable."

This jest was hazarded with caution.

Men and women, old and young, set themselves to scour the vast field of conjecture; each one thought he spied a secret, and this secret occupied all their imaginations.

By the next day their suspicions had grown more venomous. As life in a small town is balanced up to date, the women learned, the first thing in the morning, that Brigitte had made larger purchases at the market than usual. This was an indisputable fact. Brigitte had been seen

very early in the Place, and—marvelous to relate !—she had bought the only hare there was to be got. Now the whole town knew that Madame de Dey did not care for game, so this hare became the object of endless speculation. Then, as the old men were taking their usual stroll they observed a sort of concentrated activity in the countess's house, betrayed by the very precautions that the servants took to conceal it. The valet was beating a carpet in the garden ; the evening before no one would have noticed it, but as every one was constructing a romance of his own, this carpet served them for a foundation. Each person had a different tale.

The second day, the principal personages of Carentan, hearing that Madame de Dey announced that she was ill, met for the evening at the house of the mayor's brother, a retired merchant. He was a married man, honorable, and generally respected, the countess herself having a great regard for him. On this occasion all the aspirants to the rich widow's hand had a more or less probable story to tell, while each of them pondered how to turn to his own profit the secret which obliged her to compromise herself in the way she had.

The public prosecutor imagined all the details of a drama in which her son was to be brought to the countess by night. The mayor believed that a priest who had refused the oaths had come from La Vendée, and sought refuge. The president of the district was convinced it was a Chouan or Vendéan leader, hotly pursued. Others inclined to a noble escaped from the prisons in Paris. In short, everybody suspected that the countess had been guilty of one of those acts of generosity, denominated by the laws of that time "crimes," and such as might bring her to the scaffold. However, the public prosecutor whispered that they must be silent, and try to save the unfortunate lady from the abyss into which she was hurrying.

"If you publish this affair abroad," he added, "I shall be obliged to interfere, search her house, and then—!" He said no more, but every one understood his reticence.

The countess's true friends were so much alarmed for her, that, on the morning of the third day, the procureur syndic of the commune got his wife to write her a note, entreating her to hold her reception that evening as usual. The old merchant, bolder still, presented himself during the morning at Madame de Dey's house. Confident in his desire to serve her, he insisted on being shown in, when, to his utter amazement, he caught sight of her in the garden, engaged in cutting the last flowers in her borders to fill her vases.

"There's no doubt she has given refuge to her lover," said the old man, struck with pity for this charming woman. The strange expression of her face confirmed his suspicions. Deeply moved by a devotion natural in woman but always touching to us—because every man is flattered by the sacrifices a woman makes for one of them—the merchant informed the countess of the reports which were going about the town, and of the danger she was in.—"For," he concluded, "if certain of our functionaries would not be disinclined to pardon your heroism, if a priest were the object, no one will have any pity on you, if it is discovered that you are sacrificing yourself to the dictates of the heart."

At these words Madame de Dey looked at him in such a strange, wild way, that, old man as he was, he could not help shuddering.

"Come," said she, taking him by the hand and leading him into her own room. After making sure that they were alone, she drew from her bosom a soiled and crumpled letter. "Read it," she cried, pronouncing the words with a violent effort.

She fell back into her easy-chair completely overcome. While the old merchant was looking for his spectacles and wiping them clean, she raised her eyes to his face, and for the first time gazed at him curiously ; then she said sweetly, and in a changed voice : "I can trust you."

"Am I not going to take a share in your crime?" answered the worthy man simply.

She shuddered. For the first time in

that little town her soul found sympathy in the soul of another. The old merchant understood immediately both the dejection and the joy of the countess. Her son had taken part in the expedition of Granville, he had written to his mother from the depth of his prison to give her one sad, sweet hope. Confident in his plan of escape, he named three days within which he would present himself at her house in disguise. The fatal letter contained heartrending adieux in case he should not be at Carentan by the evening of the third day. He also entreated his mother to remit a considerable sum of money to the messenger who had undertaken to carry this missive to her, through innumerable dangers.

The paper quivered in the old man's hands.

"And this is the third day," cried Madame de Dey. Then she rose hastily, took the letter, and began to walk up and down the room.

"You have not been altogether prudent," said the merchant. "Why did you have provisions got in?"

"But he may arrive dying with hunger, wornout with fatigue, and—" She could not go on.

"I am certain of my brother," answered the old man; "I will go and get him on your side."

The merchant summoned up all the keenness which he had formerly employed in his commercial affairs. He gave the countess the most prudent and sagacious directions, and after having agreed together as to everything they both were to say and do, the old man invented a plausible pretext for visiting all the principal houses of Carentan. He announced in each that he had just seen Madame de Dey, and that she would hold her reception that evening, in spite of her indisposition. In the cross-examination which each family subjected him to on the nature of the countess's malady, his keenness was a match for the shrewd Normans. He managed to start on the wrong track almost every one who busied themselves with this mysterious affair. His first visit did wonders; it was to an old lady who suffered from gout. To her he related that Madame de Dey had almost died from an attack of gout on the stomach, and went on to say that the famous Tronchin having formerly prescribed, on a similar occasion, the skin of a hare flayed alive to be laid on the chest, and for the patient to lie in bed without stirring; the countess, who was in imminent danger two days before, after having scrupulously carried out Tronchin's extraordinary prescription, now felt sufficiently convalescent to receive any one who liked to visit her that evening.

This tale had an enormous success, and the doctor of Carentan, himself a Royalist *in petto*, increased its effect by the earnestness with which he discussed the remedy. However, suspicion had taken too deep root in the minds of certain obstinate or philosophic persons to be entirely dissipated; so that evening the guests of Madame de Dey were eager to arrive at her house at an early hour, some to spy into her face, some out of friendship, and most from astonishment at her marvelous cure.

They found the countess sitting in her salon at the corner of the large chimney-piece.

Her room was almost as severe as the salons of Carentan, for, to avoid wounding her narrow-minded guests, she had denied herself the pleasures of luxury to which she had been accustomed before, and had made no changes in her house. The floor of the reception-room was not even polished; she let the old dingy stuffs still hang upon the walls, still kept the country furniture, burned tallow candles, and in fact followed the fashions of Carentan.

She had adopted provincial life without shrinking from its cruelest pettinesses or its most disagreeable privations. But knowing that her guests would pardon her any expenditure conducive to their own comfort, she neglected nothing which could afford them personal enjoyment: at her house they were always sure of an excellent dinner. She even went so far as to feign avarice to please their calculating minds, and led them on to dis-

approve of certain details as concessions to luxury, in order to show that she could yield with grace.

Toward seven o'clock in the evening the upper middle-class society of Carentan was assembled at her house, and formed a large circle round her hearth. The mistress of the house, supported in her trouble by the old merchant's compassionate glances, submitted with unheard-of courage to the minute questionings and stupid, frivolous talk of her guests. But at every rap of the knocker, and whenever a footstep sounded in the street, she could scarcely control her emotion. She raised discussions affecting the prosperity of the district and such burning questions as the quality of ciders, and was so well seconded by her confidant that the company almost forgot to spy upon her, the expression of her face was so natural and her assurance so imperturbable.

However, the public prosecutor and one of the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal kept silence, watching attentively the least movement of her features, and listening, in spite of the noise, to every sound in the house. Every now and then they would ask some question calculated to embarrass her, but these she answered with admirable presence of mind. She proved how great a mother's courage can be.

After having arranged the card-tables and settled every one to boston, or reversi, or whist, Madame de Dey still remained talking with the greatest nonchalance to some young people; she played her part like a consummate actress. Presently she led them on to ask for loto, pretended to be the only person who knew where it was, and left the room.

"*Ma pauvre Brigitte,*" she cried, "I feel almost suffocated."

Her eyes were brilliant with fever and grief and impatience as she dried the tears which started quickly from them. "He is not coming," she said, looking into the bedroom into which she had come. "Here I can breathe and live.—But in a few minutes more he will be here! for he is alive, I am certain he is alive. My heart tells me so. Do you not hear something, Brigette? Oh! I would give the rest of my life to know whether he is in prison or walking across the country. I would give anything not to think."

She looked round once again to see if everything was in order in the room. A good fire burned brightly in the grate, the shutters were shut close, the furniture was polished until it shone again; the very way in which the bed was made was enough to prove that the countess herself as well as Brigitte had been busy about the smallest details. Her hopes too were manifest in all the delicate care that had evidently been spent upon this room. The scent of the flowers she had placed there seemed to shed forth, mingled with their own perfume, the gracious sweetness and the chastest caresses of love. Only a mother could thus have anticipated a soldier's wants, and prepared him such complete satisfaction of them. A dainty meal, choice wines, slippers, clean linen—in short, everything necessary or agreeable to a weary traveler, were collected together, that he might want for nothing, and that the delights of home might remind him of a mother's love.

The countess went and placed a seat at the table as if to realize her prayers and increase the strength of her illusions. As she did so she cried in a heartrending voice, "Brigitte!"

"Ah, madame, he *will* come; he cannot be far off. I am certain that he is alive and on the way," replied Brigitte. "I put a key in the Bible, and rested it on my fingers, while Cottin read the Gospel of St. John—and, madame, the key did not turn."

"Is that a sure sign?" asked the countess.

"Oh, madame, it's well known; I would stake my soul that he is still alive. God would never deceive us like that."

"In spite of the danger he will be in here; still, I long to see him."

"Poor Monsieur Auguste," cried Brigitte, "no doubt he is on the roads, on foot."

"Hark, that is eight striking," exclaimed the countess in terror.

She was afraid that she had stayed too long in the room, but there she could believe that her son still lived when she saw everything bear witness to his life. She went downstairs, but before going into the salon she waited a moment under the colonnade of the staircase, and listened for some sound to awaken the silent echoes of the town. She smiled at Brigitte's husband, who kept watch like a sentinel; his eyes seemed stupefied with straining to catch the murmurs of the Place and the first sounds of the night. Everywhere and in everything she saw her son.

A moment afterward she had returned to her guests, affecting an air of gayety, and sat down to play at loto with some girls. But every now and then she complained of feeling ill, and went to recline in her easy-chair by the fireplace.

Such was the situation, material and mental, in the house of Madame de Dey. Meanwhile, on the high road from Paris to Cherbourg, a young man clad in a brown *carmagnole*, a costume in vogue at this period, directed his steps toward Carentan.

In the commencement of the *Réquisitions* there was little or no discipline. The exigencies of the moment scarcely allowed the Republic to equip its soldiers fully at once, so that it was nothing unusual to see the roads full of *réquisitionnaires* still wearing their civil clothes. These young men arrived at the halting-places before their battalions or remained there behind them, for the progress of each man depended on his personal capability of enduring the fatigues of a long journey. The traveler in question found himself considerably in advance of a battalion of *réquisitionnaires* which was on its way to Cherbourg, and which the mayor of Carentan was waiting for from hour to hour, to billet on the inhabitants.

The young man walked with heavy steps, but still he did not falter, and his gait seemed to show that he had long been accustomed to the severities of military life. Though the moon shed her light upon the pastures around Carentan, he had noticed a thick white bank of clouds ready to cover the whole country with snow. The fear of being caught in a hurricane no doubt hastened his steps, for he was walking at a pace little suited to his weariness. He carried an almost empty knapsack on his back and in his hand a box-wood stick, cut from one of the high thick hedges which this shrub forms round most of the estates of Lower Normandy.

The towers of Carentan, thrown into fantastic relief by the moonlight, had only just come into sight, when this solitary traveler entered the town. His footfall awakened the echoes of the silent streets. He did not meet a creature, so he was obliged to inquire for the house of the mayor from a weaver who was still at his work. The mayor lived only a short distance off, and the *réquisitionnaire* soon found himself under shelter in the porch of his house. Here he applied for a billet order and sat down on a stone seat to wait. However, the mayor sent for him, so he was obliged to appear before him and become the object of a scrupulous examination. The *réquisitionnaire* was a foot soldier, a young man of fine bearing, apparently belonging to a family of distinction. His manners had the air of gentle birth, and his face expressed all the intelligence due to a good education.

"What is your name?" asked the mayor, casting a knowing glance at him.

"Julien Jussieu," replied the *réquisitionnaire.*

The magistrate let an incredulous smile escape him. "And you come—?"

"From Paris."

"Your comrades must be some distance off," replied the Norman in a bantering tone.

"I am three leagues in front of the battalion."

"No doubt some sentiment draws you to Carentan, *citoyen réquisitionnaire?*" said the mayor with a shrewd look. "It is all right," he continued. The young man was about to speak, but he motioned him to be silent and went on, "You can go, *Citoyen Jussieu!*"

There was a tinge of irony discernible

in his accent, as he pronounced these two last words and held out to him a billet order which directed him to the house of Madame de Dey. The young man read the address with an air of curiosity.

"He knows well enough that he hasn't got far to go; when he's once outside he won't be long crossing the Place!" exclaimed the mayor, talking to himself as the young man went out. "He's a fine bold fellow; God help him! He's got an answer ready to everything. Ay, but if it had been any one else but me, and they had demanded to see his papers—it would have been all up with him."

At this moment the clocks of Carentan struck half-past nine. In the antechamber at Madame de Dey's the lanterns were lighted, the servants were helping their masters and mistresses to put on their clogs and *houppelandes* and mantles, the card players had settled their accounts, and they were all leaving together, according to the established custom in little towns.

When they had exhausted all the formularies of adieu and were separating in the Place, each in the direction of his own home, one of the ladies, observing that that important personage was not with them, remarked, "It appears that the prosecutor intends to remain."

As a matter of fact, the countess was at that moment alone with that terrible magistrate; she waited, trembling, till it should please him to depart.

After a long silence, which inspired her with a feeling of terror, he said at last, "*Citoyenne*, I am here to carry out the laws of the Republic."

Madame de Dey shuddered.

"Have you nothing to reveal to me?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, in astonishment.

"Ah, madame," cried the prosecutor, sitting down beside her and changing his tone, "at this moment one word could send us—you and me—to the scaffold. I have watched your character, your mind, your manners too closely to share in the mystification by which you have succeeded in misleading your guests this evening. You are expecting your son, I have not the least doubt of it."

The countess made an involuntary gesture of denial; but she had grown pale, the muscles of her face had contracted under the necessity of displaying a coolness she did not feel; the pitiless eye of the prosecutor had not lost one of these movements.

"Well! receive him," replied this magistrate of the revolution, "but do not let him remain under your roof after seven o'clock in the morning. To-morrow at daybreak I shall come to your house armed with a denunciation which I shall get drawn up."

She looked at him with a bewildered, numbed look that might have drawn pity from a tiger.

"I shall demonstrate," he continued sweetly, "the falsity of this denunciation by a careful search. You will then be screened by the nature of my report from all ulterior suspicions. I shall speak of your patriotic gifts, your *civism*, and we shall be saved."

Madame de Dey suspected a snare; she remained motionless, her tongue was frozen and her face on fire. The sound of the knocker echoed through the house.

"Ah," cried the mother as she fell in terror upon her knees, "save him! save him!"

The public prosecutor cast a passionate glance at her.

"Yes, let us save him," he replied, "even at the cost of our own lives." He raised her politely.

"I am lost," she cried.

"Ah, madame!" he answered, with an oratorical gesture, "I would not owe you to anything—but to yourself alone."

"Madame, he's—" cried Brigitte, thinking her mistress was alone.

At the sight of the public prosecutor, the old servant, who had burst in, beaming with joy, grew pale and motionless.

"Who is it, Brigitte?" asked the magistrate, with an air of gentle intelligence.

"A *réquisitionnaire* sent us from the mayor's to lodge," answered the servant, showing him the billet order. The prosecutor read the paper. "True," said he;

"a battalion is coming to us to-night." He went out.

At that moment the countess had too much need to believe in the sincerity of her former attorney for the least doubt of it to cross her mind!

Though she had scarcely the power to stand, she ascended the staircase precipitately, opened the door of the room, saw her son, and threw herself half dead into his arms. "My child, my child," she sobbed, almost beside herself, as she covered him with kisses.

"Madame!" said a stranger's voice.

"Ah, it is not he!" she cried, recoiling in horror. She stood upright before the *réquisitionnaire* and gazed at him with haggard eyes.

"My good God, how like he is!" said Brigitte.

There was a moment's silence; even the stranger shuddered at the sight of Madame de Dey.

The first blow had almost killed her, and now she felt the full extent of her grief. She leaned for support on Brigitte's husband. "Ah, monsieur," she said, "I could not bear to see you any longer. Allow me to leave you for my servants to entertain."

She went down to her own room, half carried by Brigitte and her old manservant. "What! madame," cried the housekeeper, as she led her mistress to a chair; "is that man going to sleep in Monsieur Auguste's bed, and wear Monsieur Auguste's slippers, and eat the pasty that I made for Monsieur Auguste? If I was to be guillotined for it, I—"

"Brigitte!" cried Madame de Dey.

Brigitte was mute.

"Hold thy tongue, chatterbox," said her husband in a low voice. "Dost want to kill madame?"

At this moment the *réquisitionnaire* made a noise in his room as he sat down to the table.

"I cannot stay here," cried Madame de Dey. "I will go into the conservatory; I shall be able to hear better there what goes on outside during the night."

She was still tossed between the fear of having lost her son and the hope of seeing him come back to her.

The silence of the night was horrible. The arrival of the battalion of *réquisitionnaires* in the town, when each man sought his lodging, was a terrible moment for the countess. Her hopes were cheated at every footfall, at every sound; presently nature resumed her awful calm.

Toward morning the countess was obliged to return to her own room.

Brigitte, who was watching her mistress's movements, not seeing her come out, went into the room and found the countess dead.

"She must have heard that *réquisitionnaire*," cried Brigitte. "As soon as he has finished dressing, there he is, marching up and down Monsieur Auguste's bedroom, as if he were in a stable, singing their damned *Marseillaise!* It was enough to kill her."

The death of the countess was due to a deeper sentiment, and doubtless caused by some terrible vision. At the exact hour when Madame de Dey died at Carentan, her son was shot in le Morbihan.

We may add this tragic event to all the evidence of sympathies ignoring the laws of space, which has been collected through the learning and curiosity of certain recluses. These documents will some day serve as the groundwork whereon to base a new science — a science that has hitherto lacked its man of genius.

SCENES IN MILITARY LIFE.

I.

DOOMED TO LIVE.*

The clock of the little town of Menda had just struck midnight. At this moment a young French officer was leaning on the parapet of a long terrace which bounded the gardens of the castle. He seemed plunged in the deepest thought—a circumstance unusual amid the thoughtlessness of military life; but it must be owned that never were the hour, the night, and the place more propitious to meditation. The beautiful Spanish sky stretched out its azure dome above his head. The glittering stars and the soft moonlight lit up a charming valley that unfolded all its beauties at his feet. Leaning against a blossoming orange tree he could see, a hundred feet below him, the town of Menda, which seemed to have been placed for shelter from the north winds at the foot of the rock on which the castle was built. As he turned his head he could see the sea, framing the landscape with a broad silver sheet of glistening water. The castle was a blaze of light. The mirth and movement of a ball, the music of the orchestra, the laughter of the officers and their partners in the dance, were borne to him mingled with the distant murmur of the waves. The freshness of the night imparted a sort of energy to his limbs, weary with the heat of the day. Above all, the gardens were planted with trees so aromatic, and flowers so fragrant, that the young man stood plunged, as it were, in a bath of perfumes.

The castle of Menda belonged to a Spanish grandee, then living there with his family. During the whole of the evening his eldest daughter had looked at the officer with an interest so tinged with sadness that the sentiment of compassion thus expressed by the Spaniard might well call up a reverie in the Frenchman's mind.

Clara was beautiful, and although she had three brothers and a sister, the wealth of the Marques de Leganes seemed great enough for Victor Marchand to believe that the young lady would have a rich dowry. But how dare he hope that the most bigoted old hidalgo in all Spain would ever give his daughter to the son of a Parisian grocer? Besides, the French were hated. The marques was suspected by General Gautier, who governed the province, of planning a revolt in favor of Ferdinand VII. For this reason the battalion commanded by Victor Marchand had been cantoned in the little town of Menda, to hold the neighboring hamlets, which were dependent on the marques, in check. Recent dispatches from Marshal Ney had given ground for fear that the English would shortly land on the coast, and had indicated the marques as a man who carried on communication with the cabinet of London.

In spite, therefore, of the welcome which the Spaniard had given him and his soldiers, the young officer Victor Marchand remained constantly on his guard. As he was directing his steps toward the terrace whither he had come to examine the state

* "El Verdugo."

of the town and the country districts intrusted to his care, he debated how he ought to interpret the friendliness which the marques had unceasingly shown him, and how the tranquillity of the country could be reconciled with his general's uneasiness; but in a moment these thoughts were driven from his mind by a feeling of caution and well-grounded curiosity.

He had just perceived a considerable number of lights in the town. In spite of the day being the Feast of St. James, he had given orders, that very morning, that all lights should be extinguished at the hour prescribed by his regulations; the castle alone being excepted from this order. He could plainly see, here and there, the gleam of his soldiers' bayonets at their accustomed posts; but there was a solemnity in the silence, and nothing to suggest that the Spaniards were a prey to the excitement of a festival. After having sought to explain the offense of which the inhabitants were guilty, the mystery appeared all the more unaccountable to him, because he had left officers in charge of the night police and the rounds. With all the impetuosity of youth, he was just about to leap through a breach and descend the rocks in haste, and thus arrive more quickly than by the ordinary road at a small outpost placed at the entrance of the town nearest to the castle, when a faint sound stopped him. He thought he heard the light footfall of a woman upon the gravel walk. He turned his head and saw nothing; but his gaze was arrested by the extraordinary brightness of the sea. All of a sudden he beheld a sight so portentous that he stood dumfounded; he thought that his senses deceived him. In the far distance he could distinguish sails gleaming white in the moonlight. He trembled and tried to convince himself that this vision was an optical illusion, merely the fantastic effect of the moon on the waves. At this moment a hoarse voice pronounced his name. He looked toward the breach, and saw slowly rising above it the head of the soldier whom he had ordered to accompany him to the castle.

"Is that you, commandant?"

"Yes; what do you want?" replied the young man in a low voice. A sort of presentiment warned him to be cautious.

"Those rascals down there are stirring like worms. I have hurried, with your leave, to tell you my own little observations."

"Go on," said Victor Marchand.

"I have just followed a man from the castle who came in this direction with a lantern in his hand. A lantern's a frightfully suspicious thing. I don't fancy it was tapers my fine Catholic was going to light at this time of night. 'They want to eat us body and bones!' says I to myself; so I went on his track to reconnoiter. There, on a ledge of rock, not three paces from here, I discovered a great heap of fagots."

Suddenly a terrible shriek rang through the town, and cut the soldier short. At the same instant a gleam of light flashed before the commandant. The poor grenadier received a ball in the head and fell. A fire of straw and dry wood burst into flame like a house on fire, not ten paces from the young man. The sound of the instruments and the laughter ceased in the ball-room. The silence of death, broken only by groans, had suddenly succeeded to the noises and music of the feast. The fire of a cannon roared over the surface of the sea. Cold sweat trickled down the young officer's forehead; he had no sword. He understood that his men had been slaughtered, and the English were about to disembark. If he lived he saw himself dishonored, summoned before a council of war. Then he measured with his eyes the depth of the valley. He sprang forward, when just at that moment his hand was seized by the hand of Clara.

"Fly!" said she; "my brothers are following to kill you. Down yonder at the foot of the rock you will find Juanito's Andalusian horse. Quick!"

The young man looked at her for a moment, stupefied. She pushed him on; then, obeying the instinct of self-preservation which never forsakes even the bravest man, he rushed down the park in the direction she had indicated. He

leaped from rock to rock, where only the goats had ever trod before; he heard Clara crying out to her brothers to pursue him; he heard the footsteps of the assassins; he heard the balls of several discharges whistle about his ears; but he reached the valley, he found the horse, mounted, and disappeared swift as lightning. In a few hours he arrived at the quarters occupied by General Gautier. He found him at dinner with his staff.

"I bring you my life in my hand!" cried the commandant, his face pale and haggard.

He sat down and related the horrible disaster. A dreadful silence greeted his story.

"You appear to me to be more unfortunate than criminal," said the terrible general at last. "You are not accountable for the crime of the Spaniards, and unless the marshal decides otherwise, I acquit you."

These words could give the unfortunate officer but slight consolation.

"But when the emperor hears of it!" he exclaimed.

"He will want to have you shot," said the general. "However— But we will talk no more about it," he added severely, "except how we are to take such a revenge as will strike wholesome fear upon this country, where they carry on war like savages."

One hour afterward, a whole regiment, a detachment of cavalry, and a convoy of artillery were on the road. The general and Victor marched at the head of the column. The soldiers, informed of the massacre of their comrades, were filled with extraordinary fury. The distance which separated the town of Menda from the general quarters was passed with marvelous rapidity. On the road the general found whole villages under arms. Each of these wretched townships was surrounded and their inhabitants decimated.

By some inexplicable fatality, the English ships stood off instead of advancing. It was known afterward that these vessels had outstript the rest of the transports and only carried artillery. Thus the town of Menda, deprived of the defenders she was expecting, and which the sight of the English vessels had seemed to assure, was surrounded by the French troops almost without striking a blow. The inhabitants, seized with terror, offered to surrender at discretion. Then followed one of those instances of devotion not rare in the Peninsula. The assassins of the French, foreseeing, from the cruelty of the general, that Menda would probably be given over to the flames and the whole population put to the sword, offered to denounce themselves. The general accepted this offer, inserting, as a condition, that the inhabitants of the castle, from the lowest valet to the marques himself, should be placed in his hands. This capitulation agreed upon, the general promised to pardon the rest of the population and to prevent his soldiers from pillaging or setting fire to the town. An enormous contribution was exacted, and the richest inhabitants gave themselves up as hostages to guarantee the payment, which was to be accomplished within twenty-four hours.

The general took all precautions necessary for the safety of his troops, provided for the defense of the country, and refused to lodge his men in the houses. After having formed a camp, he went up and took military possession of the castle. The members of the family of Leganes and the servants were gagged, and shut up in the great hall where the ball had taken place, and closely watched. The windows of the apartment afforded a full view of the terrace which commanded the town. The staff was established in a neighboring gallery, and the general proceeded at once to hold a council of war on the measures to be taken for opposing the debarkation. After having dispatched an aid-de-camp to Marshal Ney, with orders to plant batteries along the coast, the general and his staff turned their attention to the prisoners. Two hundred Spaniards, whom the inhabitants had surrendered, were shot down then and there upon the terrace. After this military execution the general or-

dered as many gallows to be erected on the terrace as there were prisoners in the hall of the castle, and the town executioner to be brought. Victor Marchand made use of the time from then until dinner to go and visit the prisoners. He soon returned to the general.

"I have come," said he, in a voice broken with emotion, "to ask you a favor."

"You?" said the general, in a tone of bitter irony.

"Alas!" replied Victor, "it is but a melancholy errand that I am come on. The marques has seen the gallows being erected, and expresses a hope that you will change the mode of execution for his family; he entreats you to have the nobles beheaded."

"So be it!" said the general.

"They further ask you to allow them the last consolations of religion, and to take off their bonds; they promise not to attempt to escape."

"I consent," said the general; "but you must be answerable for them."

"The old man also offers you the whole of his fortune if you will pardon his young son."

"Really!" said the general. "His goods already belong to King Joseph; he is under arrest." His brow contracted scornfully, then he added: "I will go beyond what they ask. I understand now the importance of the last request. Well, let him buy the eternity of his name, but Spain shall remember forever his treachery and its punishment. I give up the fortune and his life to whichever of his sons will fulfill the office of executioner. Go, and do not speak to me of it again."

Dinner was ready, and the officers sat down to table to satisfy appetites sharpened by fatigue.

One of them only, Victor Marchand, was not present at the banquet. He hesitated for a long time before he entered the room. The haughty family of Leganes were in their agony. He glanced sadly at the scene before him; in this very room, only the night before, he had watched the fair heads of those two young girls and those three youths as they circled in the excitement of the dance. He shuddered when he thought how soon they must fall, struck off by the sword of the headsman.

Fastened to their gilded chairs, the father and mother, their three sons, and their two young daughters, sat absolutely motionless. Eight serving-men stood upright before them, their hands bound behind their backs. These fifteen persons looked at each other gravely, their eyes scarcely betraying the thoughts that surged within them. Only profound resignation and regret for the failure of their enterprise left any mark upon the features of some of them. The soldiers stood likewise motionless, looking at them, and respecting the affliction of their cruel enemies. An expression of curiosity lit up their faces when Victor appeared. He gave the order to unbind the condemned, and went himself to loose the cords which fastened Clara to her chair. She smiled sadly. He could not refrain from touching her arm, and looking with admiring eyes at her black locks and graceful figure. She was a true Spaniard; she had the Spanish complexion and the Spanish eyes, with their long curled lashes and pupils blacker than the raven's wing.

"Have you been successful?" she said, smiling upon him mournfully with somewhat of the charm of girlhood still lingering in her eyes.

Victor could not suppress a groan. He looked one after the other at Clara and her three brothers. One, the eldest, was aged thirty; he was small, even somewhat ill made, with a proud disdainful look, but there was a certain nobleness in his bearing; he seemed no stranger to that delicacy of feeling which elsewhere has rendered the chivalry of Spain so famous. His name was Juanito. The second, Felipe, was aged about twenty; he was like Clara. The youngest was eight, Manuel; a painter would have found in his features a trace of that Roman steadfastness which David has given to children's faces in his episodes of the Republic. The old marques, his

head still covered with white locks, seemed to have come forth from a picture of Murillo. The young officer shook his head. When he looked at them, he was hopeless that he would ever see the bargain proposed by the general accepted by either of the four; nevertheless he ventured to impart it to Clara. At first she shuddered, Spaniard though she was; then, immediately recovering her calm demeanor, she went and knelt down before her father.

"Father," she said, "make Juanito swear to obey faithfully any orders that you give him, and we shall be content."

The marquesa trembled with hope; but when she leaned toward her husband, and heard—she was a mother—the horrible confidence whispered by Clara, she swooned away. Juanito understood all; he leaped up like a lion in its cage. After obtaining an assurance of perfect submission from the marques, Victor took upon himself to send away the soldiers. The servants were led out, handed over to the executioner, and hanged. When the family had no guard but Victor to watch them, the old father rose and said, "Juanito."

Juanito made no answer, except by a movement of the head, equivalent to a refusal; then he fell back in his seat, and stared at his parents with eyes dry and terrible to look upon. Clara went and sat on his knee, put her arm round his neck, and kissed his eyelids.

"My dear Juanito," she said gayly, "if thou didst only know how sweet death would be to me if it were given by thee, I should not have to endure the odious touch of the headsman's hands. Thou wilt cure me of the woes that were in store for me—and, dear Juanito, thou couldst not bear to see me belong to another, well—" Her soft eyes cast one look of fire at Victor, as if to awaken in Juanito's heart his horror of the French.

"Have courage," said his brother Felipe, "or else our race, that has almost given kings to Spain, will be extinct."

Suddenly Clara rose, the group which had formed round Juanito separated, and this son, dutiful in his disobedience, saw his aged father standing before him, and heard him cry in a solemn voice, "Juanito, I command thee."

The young count remained motionless. His father fell on his knees before him; Clara, Manuel, and Felipe did the same instinctively. They all stretched out their hands to him as to one who was to save their family from oblivion; they seemed to repeat their father's words—"My son, hast thou lost the energy, the true chivalry of Spain? How long wilt thou leave thy father on his knees? What right hast thou to think of thine own life and its suffering? Madame, is this a son of mine?" continued the old man, turning to his wife.

"He consents," cried she in despair. She saw a movement in Juanito's eyelids, and she alone understood its meaning.

Mariquita, the second daughter, still knelt on her knees, and clasped her mother in her fragile arms; her little brother Manuel, seeing her weeping hot tears, began to chide her. At this moment the almoner of the castle came in; he was immediately surrounded by the rest of the family and brought to Juanito. Victor could bear this scene no longer; he made a sign to Clara, and hastened away to make one last effort with the general. He found him in high good-humor in the middle of the banquet drinking with his officers; they were beginning to make merry.

An hour later a hundred of the principal inhabitants of Menda came up to the terrace, in obedience to the general's orders, to witness the execution of the family of Leganes. A detachment of soldiers was drawn up to keep back these Spanish burghers who were ranged under the gallows on which the servants of the marques still hung. The feet of these martyrs almost touched their heads. Thirty yards from them a block had been set up, and by it gleamed a scimitar. The headsman also was present, in case of Juanito's refusal. Presently, in the midst of the profoundest silence, the Spaniards heard the footsteps of several persons approaching, the measured tread

of a company of soldiers, and the faint clinking of their muskets. These diverse sounds were mingled with the merriment of the officers' banquet; just as before it was the music of the dance which had concealed preparations for a treacherous massacre. All eyes were turned toward the castle; the noble family was seen advancing with incredible dignity. Every face was calm and serene; one man only leaned, pale and haggard, on the arm of the priest. Upon this man he lavished all the consolations of religion—upon the only one of them doomed to live. The executioner understood, as did all the rest, that for that day Juanito had undertaken the office himself. The aged marques and his wife, Clara, Mariquita, and their two brothers, came and knelt down a few steps from the fatal spot. Juanito was led thither by the priest. As he approached the block the executioner touched him by the sleeve and drew him aside, probably to give him certain instructions.

The confessor placed the victims in such a position that they could not see the executioner; but like true Spaniards, they knelt erect without a sign of emotion.

Clara was the first to spring forward to her brother. "Juanito," she said, "have pity on my faint-heartedness; begin with me."

At that moment they heard the footsteps of a man running at full speed, and Victor arrived on the tragic scene. Clara was already on her knees, already her white neck seemed to invite the edge of the scimitar. A deadly pallor fell upon the officer, but he still found strength to run on.

"The general grants thee thy life if thou wilt marry me," he said to her in a low voice.

The Spaniard cast a look of proud disdain on the officer. "Strike, Juanito," she said, in a voice of profound meaning.

Her head rolled at Victor's feet. When the marquesa heard the sound a convulsive start escaped her; this was the only sign of her affliction.

"Am I placed right so, dear Juanito?" little Manuel asked his brother.

"Ah, thou weepest, Mariquita!" said Juanito to his sister.

"Yes," answered the girl; "I was thinking of thee, my poor Juanito; thou wilt be so unhappy without us."

At length the noble figure of the marques appeared. He looked at the blood of his children; then he turned to the spectators, who stood mute and motionless before him. He stretched out his hands to Juanito, and said in a firm voice: "Spaniards, I give my son a father's blessing. Now, marques, strike without fear, as thou art without fault."

But when Juanito saw his mother approach, supported by the confessor, he groaned aloud, "She fed me at her own breast." His cry seemed to tear a shout of horror from the lips of the crowd. At this terrible sound the noise of the banquet and the laughter and merrymaking of the officers died away. The marquesa comprehended that Juanito's courage was exhausted. With one leap she had thrown herself over the balustrade, and her head was dashed to pieces against the rocks below. A shout of admiration burst forth. Juanito fell to the ground in a swoon.

"Marchand has just been telling me something about this execution," said a half-drunken officer. "I'll warrant, general, it wasn't by your orders that—"

"Have you forgotten, messieurs," cried General Gautier, "that during the next month there will be five hundred French families in tears, and that we are in Spain? Do you wish to leave your bones here?"

After this speech there was not a man who dared to empty his glass.

In spite of the respect with which he is surrounded—in spite of the title of El Verdugo (the executioner), bestowed upon him as a title of nobility by the king of Spain—the Marques de Leganes is a prey to melancholy. He lives in solitude, and is rarely seen. Overwhelmed with the load of his glorious crime, he seems only to wait the birth of a second son, impatient to seek again the company of those Shades who are about his path continually.

II.

THE CHOUANS.

I.

THE AMBUSH.

In the early days of the Year Eight, at the beginning of Vendémiaire, or, to adopt the present calendar, toward the end of September, 1799, some hundred peasants and a pretty large number of townsmen, who had left Fougères in the morning for Mayenne, were climbing the Pilgrim Hill which lies nearly half-way between Fougères and Ernée, a little town used by travelers as a half-way house. The detachment, divided into groups of unequal strength, presented a collection of costumes so odd, and included persons belonging to places and professions so different, that it may not be useless to describe their outward characteristics, in order to lend this history the lively coloring so much prized nowadays, notwithstanding that, as some critics say, it interferes with the portrayal of sentiments.

Some (and the greater part) of the peasants went barefoot, with no garments but a large goatskin which covered them from neck to knee, and breeches of white linen of very coarse texture, woven of yarn so rough as to show the rudeness of the country manufacture. The straight locks of their long hair mingled so regularly with the goatskin and hid their downcast faces so completely, that the goatskin itself might have been easily mistaken for their own, and the poor fellows might, at first sight, have been confounded with the animals whose spoils served to clothe them. But before long the spectator would have seen their eyes flashing through this mat of hair, like dewdrops in thick herbage; and their glances, while showing human intelligence, were better fitted to cause alarm than pleasure. On their heads they wore dirty bonnets of red wool, like the Phrygian cap which the Republic then affected as an emblem of liberty. Every man had on his shoulder a stout cudgel of knotty oak, from which there hung a long but slenderly filled wallet of linen. Some had, in addition to the bonnet, a hat of coarse felt, with wide brim, and adorned with a parti-colored woolen fillet surrounding the crown.

Others, entirely dressed in the same linen or canvas of which the breeches and wallets of the first party were composed, showed scarcely anything in their costume corresponding to modern civilization. Their long hair fell on the collar of a round jacket with little square side-pockets—a jacket coming down no lower than the hips, and forming the distinctive garb of the peasant of the West. Under the jacket, which was open, there could be seen a waistcoat of the same material, with large buttons. Some of them walked in *sabots*, while others, out of thrift, carried their shoes in their hands. This costume, soiled with long wear, grimed with sweat and dust, and less strikingly peculiar than that first described, had, from the point of view of history, the advantage of serving as a transition to the almost costly array of some few who, scattered here and there amid the troop, shone like flowers. Indeed, their blue linen breeches, their red or yellow waistcoats ornamented with two parallel rows of copper buttons, and shaped like square-cut cuirasses, contrasted as sharply with the white coats and the goatskins of their companions, as corn-flowers and poppies do with a field of wheat. Some were shod

with the *sabots* which the Breton peasants know how to make for their own use. But the great majority had large hobnailed shoes and coats of very coarse cloth, cut in that old French style which is still religiously observed by the peasantry. Their shirt-collars were fastened by silver buttons in the shape of hearts or anchors, and their wallets seemed much better stocked than those of their companions, not to mention that some finished off their traveling dress with a flask (doubtless filled with brandy) which hung by a string to their necks. Among these semi-savages there appeared some townsfolk, as if to mark the limit of civilization in these districts. In round or flat hats, and some of them in caps, with top-boots or shoes surmounted by gaiters, their costumes were as remarkably different, the one from the other, as those of the peasants. Some half-score wore the Republican jacket known as a carmagnole; others, no doubt well-to-do artisans, were clad in complete suits of cloth of a uniform color. The greatest dandies were distinguished by frocks or riding-coats in green or blue cloth more or less worn. These persons of distinction wore boots of every shape, and swished stout canes about with the air of those who make the best of "Fortune their foe."

Some heads carefully powdered, some queues twisted smartly enough, indicated the rudimentary care of personal appearance which a beginning of fortune or of education sometimes inspires. A looker-on at this group of men, associated by chance and, as it were, each astonished at finding himself with the others, might have thought them the inhabitants of a town driven pell-mell from their homes by a conflagration. But time and place gave quite a different interest to the crowd. An observer experienced in the civil discord which then agitated France would have had no difficulty in distinguishing the small number of citizens on whom the Republic could count in this assembly, composed, as it was, almost entirely of men who four years before had been in open war against her. One last and striking trait gave an infallible indication of the discordant sympathies of the gathering. Only the Republicans showed any sort of alacrity in their march.

For the other members of the troop, though the disparity of their costume was noticeable enough, their faces and their bearing exhibited the monotonous air of misfortune. Townsmen and peasants alike, melancholy marked them all deeply for her own; their very silence had a touch of ferocity in it, and they seemed weighed down by the burden of the same thought—a thought of fear, no doubt, but one carefully dissembled, for nothing definite could be read on their countenances. The sole sign which might indicate a secret arrangement was the extraordinary slowness of their march. From time to time some of them, distinguished by rosaries which hung from their necks (dangerous as it was to preserve this badge of a religion suppressed rather than uprooted), shook back their hair, and lifted their faces with an air of mistrust. At these moments they stealthily examined the woods, the by-paths, and the rocks by the roadside, after the fashion of a dog who snuffs the air and tries to catch the scent of game. Then hearing nothing but the monotonous tramp of their silent companions, they dropped their heads once more, and resumed their looks of despair, like criminals sent to the hulks for life and death.

The march of this column toward Mayenne, the motley elements which composed it, and the difference of sentiment which it manifested, received a natural enough explanation from the presence of another party which headed the detachment. Some hundred and fifty regular soldiers marched in front, armed and carrying their baggage, under the command of a "demi-brigadier." It may be desirable to inform those who have not personally shared in the drama of the Revolution, that this title replaced that of "colonel," proscribed by the patriots as too aristocratic. These soldiers belonged to the depôt of a "demi-brigade" of infantry quartered at Mayenne. In this time of discord the inhabitants of the West had been wont

to call all Republican soldiers "Blues," a surname due to the early blue and red uniforms which are still freshly enough remembered to make description superfluous. Now the detachment of Blues was escorting this company of men, almost all disgusted with their destination, to Mayenne, where military discipline would promptly communicate to them the identity of temper, of dress, and of bearing which at present they lacked so completely.

The column was, in fact, the contingent extracted with great difficulty from the district of Fougères, and due by it in virtue of the levy which the executive Directory of the French Republic had ordered by virtue of the law of the tenth Messidor preceding. The Government had asked for a hundred millions of money and a hundred thousand men, in order promptly to re-enforce its armies, at that time in process of defeat by the Austrians in Italy, by the Prussians in Germany, and threatened in Switzerland by the Russians, to whom Suwarrow gave good hope of conquering France. The departments of the West, known as Vendée and Brittany, with part of Lower Normandy, though pacified three years before by General Hoche's efforts after a four years' war, seemed to have grasped at this moment for beginning the struggle anew. In the face of so many enemies, the Republic recovered its pristine energy. The defense of the threatened departments had been at first provided for by intrusting the matter to the patriot inhabitants in accordance with one of the clauses of this law of Messidor. In reality, the Government, having neither men nor money to dispose of at home, evaded the difficulty by a piece of parliamentary brag, and having nothing else to send to the disaffected departments, presented them with its confidence.

It was perhaps also hoped that the measure, by arming the citizens one against the other, would stifle the insurrection in its cradle. The wording of the clause which led to disastrous reprisals was this: "Free companies shall be organized in the departments of the West," an unstatesmanlike arrangement which excited in the West itself such lively hostility that the Directory despaired of an easy triumph over it. Therefore, a few days later, it asked the Assembly to pass special measures in reference to the scanty contingents leviable in virtue of the Free Companies clause. So then, a new law introduced a few days before the date at which this story begins, and passed on the third complementary day of the Year Seven, ordained the organization in legions of these levies, weak as they were. The legions were to bear the names of the departments of Sarthe, Orne, Mayenne, Ille-et-Vilaine, Morbihan, Loire-Inférieure, and Maine-et-Loire; but in the words of the Bill, "being specially employed in fighting the Chouans, they might on no pretext be moved toward the frontiers."

All which details, tiresome perhaps, but not generally known, throw light at once on the weakness of the Directory and on the march of this herd of men conducted by the Blues. Nor is it perhaps useless to add that these handsome and patriotic declarations of the Directory never were put in force further than by their insertion in the "Bulletin des Louis." The decrees of the Republic, supported no longer either by great moral ideas, or by patriotism, or by terror—the forces which had once given them power—now created on paper millions of money and legions of men, whereof not a sou entered the treasury, nor a man the ranks. The springs of the Revolution had broken down in bungling hands, and the laws followed events in their application instead of deciding them.

The departments of Mayenne and of Ille-et-Vilaine were then under the military command of an old officer who, calculating on the spot the fittest measures to take, resolved to try to levy by force the Breton contingents, and especially that of Fougères, one of the most formidable centers of *Chouannerie*, hoping thereby to weaken the strength of the threatening districts. This devoted soldier availed himself of the terms of the law, illusory as they were, to declare his intention of at once arming and fitting out the "Requisitionaries," and to assert that he had

ready for them a month's pay at the rate promised by the Government to these irregular troops.

Despite the reluctance of the Bretons at that time to undertake any military service, the scheme succeeded immediately on the faith of these promises—succeeded indeed so promptly that the officer took alarm. But he was an old watch-dog, and not easy to catch asleep. No sooner had he seen a portion of the contingent of the district come in, than he suspected some secret motive in so quick a concentration, and his guess that they wished to procure arms was perhaps not ill justified. So, without waiting for laggards, he took measures for securing, if possible, his retreat on Alençon, so as to draw near settled districts, though he knew that the growing disturbance in the country made the success of his scheme very doubtful. Therefore keeping, as his instructions bade him, the deepest silence as to the disasters of the army, and the alarming news from La Vendée, he had endeavored, on the morning with which our story begins, to execute a forced march to Mayenne, where he promised himself that he would interpret the law at his own discretion, and fill the ranks of his demi-brigade with the Breton conscripts.

For this word "conscript," since so famous, had for the first time taken legal place of the term "requisitionary," given earlier to the recruits of the Republic. Before quitting Fougères, the commandant had secretly (in order not to awake the suspicion of the conscripts as to the length of the route) caused his soldiers to provide themselves with ammunition and with rations of bread sufficient for the whole party; and he was resolved not to halt at the usual resting-place of Ernée, where, having recovered their first surprise, his contingent might have opened communication with the Chouans who were doubtless spread over the neighboring country. The sullen silence which prevailed among the requisitionaries, caught unawares by the old Republican's device, and the slowness of their march over the hill, excited vehement distrust in this demi-brigadier, whose name was Hulot. All the striking points of the sketch we have given, had attracted his closest attention: so that he proceeded in silence among his five young officers, who all respected their chief's taciturnity. But at the moment when Hulot reached the crest of the Pilgrim Hill, he turned his head sharply, and as though instinctively, to glance at the disturbed countenances of the requisitionaries, and was not long in breaking silence. Indeed, the increasing slackness of the Bretons' march had already put a distance of some two hundred paces beeween them and their escort. Hulot made a peculiar grimace which was habitual with him.

"What is the matter with these dainty gentlemen?" cried he in a loud tone. "I think our conscripts are planting their stumps instead of stirring them!"

At these words the officers who were with him turned with a sudden movement, somewhat resembling the start with which a sleeping man wakes at a sudden noise. Sergeants and corporals did the like; and the whole company stopped without having heard the wished-for sound of "Halt!" If at first the officers directed their eyes to the detachment which, like a lengthened tortoise, was slowly climbing the hill, they—young men whom the defense of their country had torn, with many others, from higher studies, and in whom war had not yet extinguished liberal tastes—were sufficiently struck with the spectacle beneath their eyes to leave unanswered a remark of which they did not seize the importance. Though they had come from Fougères, whence the tableau which presented itself to their eyes is also visible, though with the usual differences resulting from a change in the point of view, they could not help admiring it for the last time, like dilettanti, who take all the more pleasure in music the better they know its details.

From the summit of the Pilgrim the traveler sees beneath his eyes the wide valley of the Couësnon, one of the culminating points on the horizon being occupied by the town of Fougères, the castle

of which dominates three or four important roads from the height which it occupies. This advantage formerly made it one of the keys of Brittany. From their position the officers could descry, in all its extent, a river basin as remarkable for the extraordinary fertility of its soil as for the varied character of its aspect. On all sides mountains of granite rise in a circle, disguising their ruddy sides under oak woods and hiding in their slopes valleys of delicious coolness. These rocky hills present to the eye a vast circular inclosure, at the bottom of which there extends a huge expanse of soft meadow, arranged like an English garden. The multitude of green hedges surrounding many properties irregular in size, but all of them well wooded, gives this sheet of green an aspect rare in France, and it contains in its multiplied contrast of aspect a wealth of secret beauties lavish enough to influence even the coldest minds.

At the time we speak of, the landscape was illuminated by that fleeting splendor with which Nature delights sometimes to heighten the beauty of her everlasting creations. While the detachment was crossing the valley the rising sun had slowly dissipated the light white mists which in September mornings are wont to flit over the fields. At the moment when the soldiers turned their heads, an invisible hand seemed to strip the landscape of the last of its veils—veils of delicate cloud like a shroud of transparent gauze, covering precious jewels and heightening curiosity as they shine through it—over the wide horizon which presented itself to the officers. The sky showed not the faintest cloud to suggest, by its silver sheen, that the huge blue vault was the firmament. It seemed rather a silken canopy supported at irregular intervals by the mountain-tops, and set in the air to protect the shining mosaic of field and meadow, stream and woodland. The officers could not weary of surveying this wide space, so fertile in pastoral beauty. Some were long before they could prevent their gaze from wandering among the wonderful maze of thickets bronzed richly by the yellowing foliage of some tufts of trees, and set off by the emerald greenness of the intervening lawns. Others fixed their eyes on the contrast offered by the ruddy fields, where the buckwheat, already harvested, rose in tapering sheaves like the stacks of muskets piled by the soldier where he bivouacs, and divided from each other by other fields where patches of rye, already past the sickle, showed their lighter gold. Here and there were a few roofs of somber slate, whence rose white smoke. And next the bright and silvery slashes made by the tortuous streams of the Couësnon caught the eye with one of those optical tricks which, without obvious reason, cast a dreamy vagueness on the mind.

The balmy freshness of the autumn breeze, the strong odor of the forests, rose like a cloud of incense, and intoxicated the admiring gazers on this lovely country—gazers who saw with rapture its unknown flowers, its flourishing vegetation, its verdure equal to that of its neighbor and in one way namesake, England. The scene, already worthy enough of the theater, was further enlivened by cattle, while the birds sang and made the whole valley utter a sweet, low melody which vibrated in the air. If the reader's imagination will concentrate itself so as fully to conceive the rich accidents of light and shade, the misty mountain horizons, the fantastic perspectives which sprang from the spots where trees were missing, from those where water ran, from those where coy windings of the landscape faded away; if his memory will color, so to speak, a sketch, as fugitive as the moment when it was taken, then those who can taste such pictures will have an idea, imperfect it is true, of the magical scene which surprised the still sensitive minds of the youthful officers.

They could not help an involuntary emotion of pardon for the natural tardiness of the poor men who, as they thought, were regretfully quitting their dear country to go—perhaps to die—afar off in a strange land; but with the generous feeling natural to soldiers, they hid their sympathy under a pretended desire of examining the military positions of the

country. Hulot, however, whom we must call the commandant, to avoid giving him the inelegant name of demi-brigadier, was one of those warriors who, when danger presses, are not the men to be caught by the charms of a landscape, were they those of the Earthly Paradise itself. So he shook his head disapprovingly, and contracted a pair of thick black eyebrows which gave a harsh cast to his countenance.

"Why the devil do they not come on?" he asked a second time, in a voice deepened by the hardships of war. "Is there some kind Virgin in the village whose hand they are squeezing?"

"You want to know why?" answered a voice.

The commandant, hearing sounds like those of the horn with which the peasants of these valleys summon their flocks, turned sharply round as though a sword-point had pricked him, and saw, two paces off, a figure even odder than any of those whom he was conveying to Mayenne to serve the Republic. The stranger—a short, stoutly built man with broad shoulders—showed a head nearly as big as a bull's, with which it had also other resemblances. Thick nostrils shortened the nose in appearance to even less than its real length. The man's blubber lips, pouting over teeth white as snow, his flapping ears and his red hair made him seem akin rather to herbivorous animals than to the goodly Caucasian race. Moreover, the bare head was made still more remarkable by its complete lack of some other features of a man who has lived in the society of his fellows.

The face, sun-bronzed and with sharp outlines vaguely suggesting the granite of which the country-side consists, was the only visible part of this singular being's person. From the neck downward he was wrapped in a *sarrau*—a kind of smock-frock in red linen, coarser still than that of the poorest conscripts' wallets and breeches. This *sarrau*, in which an antiquary might have recognized the *saga*, *saye*, or *sayon* of the Gauls, ended at the waist, being joined to tight breeches of goatskin by wooden fastenings roughly sculptured, but in part still with the bark on. These goatskins, or *peaux de bique* in local speech, which protected his thighs and his legs, preserved no outline of the human form. Huge wooden shoes hid his feet, while his hair, long, glistening, and not unlike the nap of his goatskins, fell on each side of his face, evenly parted, and resembling certain mediæval sculptures still to be seen in cathedrals. Instead of the knotty stick which the conscripts bore on their shoulders, he carried, resting on his breast like a gun, a large whip, the lash of which was cunningly plaited, and seemed twice the length of whip-lashes in general. There was no great difficulty in explaining the sudden apparition of this strange figure; indeed, at first sight some of the officers took the stranger for a requisitionary or conscript (the two words were still used indifferently) who was falling back on his column, perceiving that it had halted. Still, the commandant was much surprised by the man's arrival; and though he did not seem in the least alarmed, his brow clouded. Having scanned the stranger from head to foot, he repeated, in a mechanical fashion and as though preoccupied with gloomy ideas, "Yes; why do they not come on? do you know, man?"

"The reason," replied his sinister interlocutor, in an accent which showed that he spoke French with difficulty, "the reason is," and he pointed his huge rough hand to Ernée, "that there is Maine, and here Brittany ends."

And he smote the ground hard, throwing the heavy handle of his whip at the commandant's feet. The impression produced on the bystanders by the stranger's laconic harangue was not unlike that which the beat of a savage drum might make in the midst of the regular music of a military band; yet "harangue" is hardly word enough to express the hatred and the thirst for vengeance which breathed through his haughty gesture, his short fashion of speech, and his countenance full of a cold, fierce energy. The very rudeness of the man's appearance, fashioned as he was as though by ax-

blows, his rugged exterior, the dense ignorance imprinted on his features, made him resemble some savage demigod. He kept his seer-like attitude, and seemed like an apparition of the very genius of Brittany aroused from a three-years' sleep, and ready to begin once more a war where victory never showed herself except swathed in mourning for both sides.

"Here is a pretty fellow!" said Hulot, speaking to himself; "he looks as if he were the spokesman of others who are about to open a parley in gunshot language."

But when he had muttered these words between his teeth, the commandant ran his eyes in turn from the man before him to the landscape, from the landscape to the detachment, from the detachment to the steep slopes of the road, their crests shaded by the mighty Breton broom. Then he brought them back sharply on the stranger, as it were questioning him mutely before he ended with the bruskly spoken question, "Whence come you?"

His eager and piercing eye tried to guess the secrets hidden under the man's impenetrable countenance, which in the interval had fallen into the usual sheepish expression of torpidity that wraps the peasant when not in a state of excitement.

"From the country of the *Gars*," answered the man, quite unperturbed.

"Your name?"

"*Marche-à-Terre.*"

"Why do you still use your Chouan name in spite of the law?"

But Marche-à-Terre, as he was pleased to call himself, stared at the commandant with so utterly truthful an air of imbecility that the soldier thought he really had not understood him.

"Are you one of the Fougères contingent?"

To which question Marche-à-Terre answered by one of those "I don't know's" whose very tone arrests all further inquiry in despair. He seated himself calmly by the wayside, drew from his smock some pieces of thin and black buckwheat cake—a national food whose unenticing delights can be comprehended of Bretons alone—and began to eat with a stolid nonchalance. He gave the impression of so complete a lack of intelligence that the officers by turns compared him, as he sat there, to one of the cattle browsing on the fat pasturage of the valley, to the savages of America, and to one of the aborigines of the Cape of Good Hope.

Deceived by his air, the commandant himself was beginning not to listen to his own doubts, when, prudently giving a last glance at the man whom he suspected of being the herald of approaching carnage, he saw his hair, his smock, his goatskins, covered with thorns, scraps of leaves, splinters of timber and brushwood, just as if the Chouan had made a long journey through dense thickets. He glanced significantly at his adjutant Gérard, who was near him, squeezed his hand hard, and whispered, "We came for wool, and we shall go home shorn."

The officers gazed at each other in silent astonishment.

It may be convenient to digress a little here in order to communicate the fears of Commandant Hulot to some home keeping folk who doubt everything because they see nothing, and who might even deny the existence of men like Marche-à-Terre and those peasants of the West whose behavior was then so heroic. The word *gars* (pronounced *gâ*) is a waif of Celtic. It has passed from Low Breton into French, and the word is, of our whole modern vocabulary, that which contains the oldest memories. The *gais* was the chief weapon of the Gaels or Gauls: *gaisde* meant "armed"; *gais*, "bravery"; *gas*, "force"—comparison with which terms will show the connection of the word *gars* with these words of our ancestors' tongue. The word has a further analogy with the Latin *vir*, "man"; the root of *virtus*, "strength," "courage." This little disquisition may be excused by its patriotic character; and it may further serve to rehabilitate in some persons' minds terms such as *gars*, *garcon*, *garconnette*, *garce*, *garcette*, which are generally excluded from common parlance as improper, but which

have a warlike origin, and which will recur here and there in the course of our history.

"'Tis a brave wench" (*garce*) was the somewhat misunderstood praise which Madame de Staël received in a little village of the Vendômois, where she spent some days of her exile. Now Brittany is of all France the district where Gaulish customs have left the deepest trace. The parts of the province where, even in our days, the wild life and the superstitious temper of our rude forefathers may still, so to speak, be taken red-handed, are called the country of the *gars*. When a township is inhabited by a considerable number of wild men like him who has just appeared on our scene, the country-folk call them "the *gars* of such and such a parish;" and this stereotyped appellation is a kind of reward for the fidelity with which these *gars* strive to perpetuate the traditions of Gaulish language and manners. Thus, also, their life keeps deep traces of the superstitious beliefs and practices of ancient times. In one place, feudal customs are still observed; in another, antiquaries find Druidic monuments still standing; in yet another, the spirit of modern civilization is aghast at having to make its way through huge primeval forests. An inconceivable ferocity and a bestial obstinacy, found in company with the most absolute fidelity to an oath; a complete absence of our laws, our manners, our dress, our new-fangled coinage, our very language, combined with a patriarchal simplicity of life and with heroic virtues, unite in reducing the dwellers in these regions below the Mohicans and the redskins of North America in the higher intellectual activities, but make them as noble, as cunning, as full of fortitude as these.

Placed as Brittany is in the center of Europe, it is a more curious field of observation than Canada itself. Surrounded by light and heat, whose beneficent influences do not touch it, the country is like a coal which lies "black-out" and ice-cold in the midst of a glowing hearth. All the efforts which some enlightened spirits have made to win this beautiful part of France over to social life and commercial prosperity — nay, even the attempts of Government in the same direction — perish whelmed in the undisturbed bosom of a population devoted to immemorial use and wont. But sufficient explanations of this ill-luck are found in the character of the soil, still furrowed with ravines, torrents, lakes, and marshes; still bristling with hedges — improvised earth-works, which make a fastness of every field; destitute alike of roads and canals; and finally, in virtue of the genius of an uneducated population, delivered over to prejudices whose dangerous nature our history will discover, and obstinately hostile to new methods of agriculture. The very picturesque arrangement of the country, the very superstitions of its inhabitants, prevent at once the association of individuals and the advantages of comparison and exchange of ideas. There are no villages in Brittany; and the rudely built structures which are called dwellings are scattered all over the country. Each family lives as if in a desert; and the only recognized meetings are the quickly dissolved congregations which Sunday and other ecclesiastical festivals bring together at the parish church. These meetings, where there is no exchange of conversation, and which are dominated by the *rector*, the only master whom these rude spirits admit, last a few hours only. After listening to the awe-inspiring words of the priest, the peasant goes back for a whole week to his unwholesome dwelling, which he leaves but for work, and whither he returns but to sleep. If he receives a visitor, it is still the rector, the soul of the country-side.

And thus it was that at the voice of such priests thousands of men flew at the throat of the Republic, and that these quarters of Brittany furnished, five years before the date at which our story begins, whole masses of soldiery for the first *Chouannerie*. The brothers Cottereau, bold smugglers, who gave this war its name, plied their perilous trade between Laval and Fougères. But the insurrection in these districts had no character of

nobility. And it may be said with confidence that if La Vendée made war of brigandage,* Brittany made brigandage of war. The proscription of the royal family, the destruction of religion, were to the Chouans only a pretext for plunder; and the incidents of intestine strife took some color from the wild roughness of the manners of the district. When real defenders of the monarchy came to recruit soldiers among these populations, equally ignorant and warlike, they tried in vain to infuse under the white flag some element of sublimity into the raids which made *Chouannerie* odious; and the Chouans remain a memorable instance of the danger of stirring up the more uncivilized portions of a people.

The above-given description of the first valley which Brittany offers to the traveler's eye, the picture of the men who made up the detachment of requisitionaries, the account of the *gars* who appeared at the top of Pilgrim Hill, give in miniature a faithful idea of the province and its inhabitants; any trained imagination can, by following these details, conceive the theater and the methods of the war; for its whole elements are there. At that time the blooming hedges of these lovely valleys hid invisible foes: each meadow was a place of arms, each tree threatened a snare, each willow trunk held an ambuscade. The field of battle was everywhere. At each corner gun-barrels lay in wait for the Blues, whom young girls laughingly enticed under fire, without thinking themselves guilty of treachery. Nay, they made pilgrimage with their fathers and brothers to this and that Virgin of worm-eaten wood to ask at once for suggestion of stratagems and absolution of sins. The religion, or rather the fetichism, of these uneducated creatures, robbed murder of all remorse. Thus, when once the strife was entered on, the whole country was full of terrors: noise was as alarming as silence; an amiable reception as threats; the family hearth as the highway. Treachery itself was convinced of its honesty; and the Bretons were savages who served God and the king on the principles of Mohicans on the war-path. But to give a description, exact in all points, of this struggle, the historian ought to add that no sooner was Hoche's peace arranged than the whole country became smiling and friendly. The very families who over night had been at each other's throats, supped the next day without fear of danger under the same roof.

Hulot had no sooner detected the secret indications of treachery which Marche-à-Terre's goatskins revealed, than he became certain of the breach of this same fortunate peace, due once to the genius of Hoche, and now, as it seemed to him, impossible to maintain. So, then, war had revived, and no doubt would be, after a three-years' rest, more terrible than ever. The revolution, which had waxed milder since the Ninth Thermidor, would very likely resume the character of terror which made it odious to well-disposed minds. English gold had doubtless, as always, helped the internal discords of France. The Republic, abandoned by young Bonaparte, who had seemed its tutelary genius, appeared incapable of resisting so many enemies, the worst of whom was showing himself last. Civil war, foretold already by hundreds of petty risings, assumed an air of altogether novel gravity when the Chouans dared to conceive the idea of attacking so strong an escort. Such were the thoughts which followed one another (though by no means so succinctly put) in the mind of Hulot as soon as he seemed to see in the apparition of Marche-à-Terre a sign of an adroitly laid ambush; for he alone at once understood the hidden danger.

The silence following the commandant's prophetic observation to Gérard, with which we finished our last scene, gave Hulot an opportunity of recovering his coolness. The old soldier had nearly staggered. He could not clear his brow as he thought of being surrounded al-

* I have done violence to the text here as printed: *Si La Vendée fit un brigandage de la guerre.* But the point of the antithesis and the truth of history seem absolutely to require the supposition of a misprint.

ready by the horrors of a war whose atrocities cannibals themselves might haply have refused to approve. Captain Merle and Adjutant Gérard, his two friends, were at a loss to explain the alarm, so new to them, which their chief's face showed; and they gazed at Marche-à-Terre, who was still placidly eating his bannocks at the road-side, without being able to see the least connection between a brute beast of this kind and the disquiet of their valiant leader. But Hulot's countenance soon grew brighter; sorry as he was for the Republic's ill-fortune, he was rejoiced at having to fight for her, and he cheerfully promised himself not to fall blindly into the nets of the Chouans, and to outwit the man, however darkly cunning he might be, whom they did himself the honor to send against him.

Before, however, making up his mind to any course of action, he set himself to examine the position in which his enemies would fain surprise him. When he saw that the road in the midst of which he was engaged passed through a kind of gorge, not, it is true, very deep, but flanked by woods, and with several by-paths debouching on it, he once more frowned hard with his black brows, and then said to his friends, in a low voice, full of emotion:

"We are in a pretty wasps'-nest!"

"But of whom are you afraid?" asked Gérard.

"Afraid?" repeated the commandant. "Yes; afraid is the word. I always have been afraid of being shot like a dog, as the road turns a wood with no one to cry 'Qui vive?'"

"Bah!" said Merle, laughing; "'Qui vive?' itself is a bad phrase!"

"Are we, then, really in danger?" asked Gérard, as much surprised at Hulot's coolness as he had been at his passing fear.

"Hist!" said the commandant; "we are in the wolf's throat and as it is as dark there as in a chimney, we had better light a candle. Luckily," he went on, "we hold the top of the ridge." He bestowed a forcible epithet upon the said ridge, and added, "I shall see my way soon, perhaps." Then taking the two officers with him, he posted them round Marche-à-Terre; but the *gars*, pretending to think that he was in their way, rose quickly. "Stay there, rascal!" cried Hulot, giving him a push, and making him fall back on the slope where he had been sitting. And from that moment the demi-brigadier kept his eye steadily on the Breton, who seemed quite indifferent. "Friends," said he, speaking low to the two officers, "it is time to tell you that the fat is in the fire down there at Paris. The Directory, in consequence of a row in the Assembly, has muddled our business once more. The pentarchy of pantaloons (the last word is nearer French at any rate) have lost a good blade, for Bernadotte will have nothing more to do with them."

"Who takes his place?" asked Gérard, eagerly.

"Milet-Mureau, an old dotard. 'Tis an awkward time for choosing blockheads to steer the ship. Meanwhile, English signal-rockets are going off round the coast; all these cockchafers of Vendéans and Chouans are abroad on the wing: and those who pull the strings of the puppets have chosen their time just when we are beaten to our knees."

"How so?" said Merle.

"Our armies are being beaten on every side," said Hulot, lowering his voice more and more. "The Chouans have twice interrupted the post, and I only received my last dispatches and the latest decrees by an express which Bernadotte sent the moment he quitted the ministry. Luckily, friends have given me private information of the mess we are in. Fouché has found out that the tyrant Louis XVIII. has been warned by traitors at Paris to send a chief to lead his wild ducks at home here. It is thought that Barras is playing the Republic false. In fine, Pitt and the princes have sent hither a *ci-devant*, a man full of talent and vigor, whose hope is to unite Vendéans and Chouans, and so lower the Republic's crest. The fellow has actually landed in Morbihan; I learned it before any one, and told our clever ones

at Paris. He calls himself the *Gars*. For all these cattle," said he, pointing to Marche-à-Terre, "fit themselves with names which would give an honest patriot a stomach-ache if he bore them. Moreover, our man is about here; and the appearance of this Chouan" (he pointed to Marche-à-Terre once more) "shows me that he is upon us. But they don't teach tricks to an old monkey; and you shall help me to cage my birds in less than no time. I should be a pretty fool if I let myself be trapped like a crow by a *ci-devant* who comes from London to dust our jackets for us!"

When they learned this secret and critical intelligence, the two officers, knowing that their commandant never took alarm at shadows, assumed the steady mien which soldiers wear in time of danger when they are of good stuff and accustomed to look ahead in human affairs. Gérard, whose post, since suppressed, put him in close relations with his chief, was about to answer and to inquire into all the political news, a part of which had evidently been omitted. But at a sign from Hulot he refrained, and all three set themselves to watch Marche-à-Terre. Yet the Chouan did not exhibit the faintest sign of emotion, though he saw himself thus scanned by men as formidable by their wits as by their bodily strength. The curiosity of the two officers, new to this kind of warfare, was vividly excited by the beginning of an affair which seemed likely to have something of the interest of a romance, and they were on the point of making jokes on the situation. But at the first word of the kind that escaped them, Hulot said, with a grave look, "God's thunder, citizens! don't light your pipes on the powder barrel. Cheerfulness out of season is as bad as water poured into a sieve. Gérard," continued he, leaning toward his adjutant's ear, "come quietly close to this brigand, and be ready at his first suspicious movement to run him through the body. For my part, I will take measures to keep up the conversation, if our unknown friends are good enough to begin it."

Gérard bowed slightly to intimate obedience, and then began to observe the chief objects of the valley, which have been sufficiently described. He seemed to wish to examine them more attentively, and kept walking up and down and without ostensible object; but you may be sure that the landscape was the last thing he looked at. For his part, Marche-à-Terre gave not a sign of consciousness that the officer's movements threatened him; from the way in which he played with his whip-lash, you might have thought that he was fishing in the ditch by the roadside.

While Gérard thus maneuvered to gain a position in front of the Chouan, the commandant whispered to Merle: "Take a sergeant with ten picked men and post them yourself above us at the spot on the hill-top where the road widens out level, and where you can see a good long stretch of the way to Ernée; choose a place where there are no trees at the roadside, and where the sergeant can overlook the open country. Let Clef-des-Cœurs be the man: he has his wits about him. It is no laughing matter: I would not give a penny for our skins if we do not take all the advantage we can get."

While Captain Merle executed this order with a promptitude of which he well knew the importance, the commandant shook his right hand to enjoin deep silence on the soldiers who stood round him, and who were talking at ease. Another gesture bade them get once more under arms. As soon as quiet prevailed, he directed his eyes first to one side of the road and then to the other, listeninig with anxious attention, as if he hoped to catch some stifled noise, some clatter of weapons, or some foot-falls preliminary to the expected trouble. His black and piercing eye seemed to probe the furthest recesses of the woods; but as no symptoms met him there, he examined the gravel of the road after the fashion of savages, trying to discover some traces of the invisible enemy whose audacity was well known to him.

In despair at seeing nothing to justify his fears, he advanced to the edge of the roadway, and after carefully climbing its

slight risings, paced their tops slowly; but then he remembered how indispensable his experience was to the safety of his troops, and descended. His countenance darkened: for the chiefs of those days always regretted that they were not able to keep the most dangerous tasks for themselves. The other officers and the privates, noticing the absorption of a leader whose disposition they loved, and whose bravery they knew, perceived that his extreme care betokened some danger; but as they were not in a position to appreciate its gravity, they remained motionless, and, by a sort of instinct, even held their breaths. Like dogs who would fain make out the drift of the orders—to them incomprehensible—of a cunning hunter, but who obey him implicitly, the soldiers gazed by turns at the valley of the Couësnon, at the woods by the roadside, and at the stern face of their commander, trying to read their impending fate in each. Glance met glance, and even more than one smile ran from lip to lip.

As Hulot bent his brows, Beau-Pied, a young sergeant who passed for the wit of the company, said, in a half whisper: "Where the devil have we put our foot in it that an old soldier like Hulot makes such muddy faces at us? he looks like a court-martial!"

But Hulot bent a stern glance on Beau-Pied, and the due "silence in the ranks" once more prevailed. In the midst of this solemn hush the laggard steps of the conscripts, under whose feet the gravel gave a dull crunch, distracted vaguely, with its regular pulse, the general anxiety. Only those can comprehend such an indefinite feeling, who, in the grip of some cruel expectation, have during the stilly night felt the heavy beatings of their own hearts quicken at some sound whose monotonous recurrence seems to distill terror drop by drop. But the commandant once more took his place in the midst of the troops, and began to ask himself, "Can I have been deceived?" He was beginning to look, with gathering anger flashing from his eyes, on the calm and stolid figure of Marche-à-Terre, when a touch of savage irony which he seemed to detect in the dull eyes of the Chouan urged him not to discontinue his precautions. At the same moment Captain Merle, after carrying out Hulot's orders, came up to rejoin him. The silent actors in this scene, so like a thousand other scenes which made this war exceptionally dramatic, waited impatiently for new incidents, eager to see light thrown on the dark side of their military situation by the maneuvers which might follow.

"We did well, captain," said the commandant, "to set the few patriots among these requisitionaries at the tail of the detachment. Take a dozen more stout fellows, put Sub-lieutenant Lebrun at their head, and lead them at quick march to the rear. They are to support the patriots who are there, and to bustle on the whole flock of geese briskly, so as to bring it up at the double to the height which their comrades already occupy. I will wait for you."

The captain disappeared in the midst of his men, and the commandant, looking by turns at four brave soldiers whose activity and intelligence were known to him, beckoned silently to them with a friendly gesture of the fingers, signifying "Come;" and they came.

"You served with me under Hoche," he said, "when we brought those brigands who called themselves the 'King's Huntsmen' to reason; and you know how they used to hide themselves in order to pot the Blues!"

At this encomium on their experience the four soldiers nodded with a significant grin, exhibiting countenances full of soldierly heroism, but whose careless indifference announced that, since the struggle had begun between France and Europe, they had thought of nothing beyond their knapsacks behind them and their bayonets in front. Their lips were contracted as with tight-drawn purse-strings, and their watchful and curious eyes gazed at their leader.

"Well," continued Hulot, who possessed in perfection the art of speaking the soldier's highly colored language, "old hands such as we must not let ourselves be caught by Chouans, and there

are Chouans about here, or my name is not Hulot. You four must beat the two sides of the road in front. The detachment will go slowly. Keep up well with it. Try not to lose the number of your mess,* and do your scouting there smartly."

Then he pointed out to them the most dangerous heights on the way. They all, by way of thanks, carried the backs of their hands to the old three-cornered hats, whose tall brims, rain-beaten and limp with age, slouched on the crown; and one of them, Larose, a corporal, and well known to Hulot, made his musket ring, and said, "We will play them a tune on the rifle, commandant!"

They set off, two to the right, the others to the left; and the company saw them disappear on both sides with no slight anxiety. This feeling was shared by the commandant, who had little doubt that he was sending them to certain death. He could hardly help shuddering when the tops of their hats were no longer visible, while both officers and men heard the dwindling sound of their steps on the dry leaves with a feeling all the acuter that it was carefully veiled. For in war there are situations when the risk of four men's lives causes more alarm than the thousands of slain at a battle of Jemmapes. Soldiers' faces have such various and such rapidly fleeting expressions, that those who would sketch them are forced to appeal to memories of soldiers, and to leave peaceable folk to study for themselves their dramatic countenances, for storms so rich in details as these could not be described without intolerable tediousness.

Just as the last flash of the four bayonets disappeared, Captain Merle returned, having accomplished the commandant's orders with the speed of lightning. Hulot, with a few words of command, set the rest of his troops in fighting order in the middle of the road. Then he bade them occupy the summit of the Pilgrim, where his scanty vanguard was posted; but he himself marched last and backward so as to note the slightest change at any point of the scene which Nature had made so beautiful and man so full of fear. He had reached the spot where Gérard was mounting guard on Marche-à-Terre, when the Chouan, who had followed with an apparently careless eye all the commandant's motions, and who was at the moment observing with unexpected keenness the two soldiers who were busy in the woods at the right, whistled twice or thrice in such a manner as to imitate the clear and piercing note of the screech-owl.

Now, the three famous smugglers mentioned above used in the same way to employ at night certain variations on this hoot in order to interchange intelligence of ambuscades, of threatening dangers, and of every fact of importance to them. It was from this that the surname *Chuin*, the local word for the owl, was given to them, and the term, slightly corrupted, served in the first war to designate those who followed the ways and obeyed the signals of the brothers. When he heard this suspicious whistle, the commandant halted, and looked narrowly at Marche-à-Terre. He pretended to be deceived by the sheepish air of the Chouan, on purpose to keep him near to himself, as a barometer to indicate the movements of the enemy. And therefore he checked the hand of Gérard, who was about to dispatch him. Then he posted two soldiers a couple of paces from the spy, and in loud, clear tones bade them shoot him at the first signal that he gave. Yet Marche-à-Terre, in spite of his imminent danger, did not show any emotion, and the commandant, who was still observing him, noting his insensibility, said to Gérard: "The goose does not know his business. 'Tis never easy to read a Chouan's face, but this fellow has betrayed himself by wishing to show his pluck. Look you, Gérard, if he had pretended to be afraid, I should have taken him for a mere fool. There would have been a pair of us, and I should have been at my wits' end. Now it is certain that

* This is a naval rather than a military metaphor; but I do not know how the law recruit would express *descendre la garde*.

we shall be attacked. But they may come; I am ready."

Having said these words in a low voice, and with a triumphant air, the old soldier rubbed his hands and glanced slyly at Marche-à-Terre. Then he crossed his arms on his breast, remained in the middle of the road between his two favorite officers, and waited for the event of his dispositions. Tranquil at last as to the result of the fight, he surveyed his soldiers with a calm countenance.

"There will be a row in a minute," whispered Beau-Pied; "the commandant is rubbing his hands."

Such a critical situation as that in which Commandant Hulot and his detachment were placed, is one of those where life is so literally at stake that men of energy make it a point of honor to show coolness and presence of mind. At such moments manhood is put to a last proof. So the commandant, knowing more of the danger than his officers, plumed himself all the more on appearing the most tranquil. By turns inspecting Marche-à-Terre, the road, and the woods, he awaited, not without anxiety, the sound of a volley from the Chouans, who, he doubted not, were lurking like forest-demons around him. His face was impassive. When all the soldiers' eyes were fixed on his, he slightly wrinkled his brown cheeks pitted with small-pox, drew up the right side of his lip, and winked hard, producing a grimace which his men regularly understood to be a smile. Then he clapped Gérard's shoulder, and said, "Now that we are quiet, what were you going to say to me?"

"What new crisis is upon us, commandant?"

"The thing is not new," answered he, in a low tone. "The whole of Europe is against us, and this time the cards are with them. While our directors are squabbling among themselves like horses without oats in a stable, and while their whole administration is going to pieces, they leave the army without supplies. In Italy we are simply lost! Yes, my friends, we have evacuated Mantua in consequence of losses on the Trebia, and Joubert has just lost a battle at Novi. I only hope Massena may be able to keep the passes in Switzerland against Suwarrow. We have been driven in on the Rhine, and the Directory has sent Moreau there. Will the fellow be able to hold the frontier? Perhaps; but sooner or later the coalition must crush us, and the only general who could save us is—the devil knows where—down in Egypt. Besides, how could he get back? England is mistress of the seas."

"I do not care so much about Bonaparte's absence, commandant," said the young adjutant Gérard, in whom a careful education had developed a naturally strong understanding. "Do you mean that the Revolution will be arrested in its course? Ah no! we are not only charged with the duty of defending the frontiers of France; we have a double mission. Are we not bound as well to keep alive the genius of our country, the noble principles of liberty and independence, the spirit of human reason which our Assemblies have aroused, and which must advance from time to time? France is as a traveler commissioned to carry a torch: she holds it in one hand, and defends herself with the other. But if your news is true, never during ten years have more folk anxious to blow the torch out thronged around us. Our faith and our country both must be near perishing."

"Alas! 'tis true," sighed Commandant Hulot; "our puppets of Directors have taken good care to quarrel with all the men who could steer the ship of state. Bernadotte, Carnot, all, even citizen Talleyrand, have left us. There is but a single good patriot left—friend Fouché, who keeps things together by means of the police. That is a man for you! It was he who warned me in time of this rising—and what is more, I am sure we are caught in a trap of some sort."

"Oh!" said Gérard, "if the army has not some finger in the government, these attorney fellows will put us in a worse case than before the Revolution. How can such weasels know how to command?"

"I am always in fear," said Hulot, "of hearing that they are parleying with the

Bourbons. God's thunder! if they came to terms, we should be in a pickle here!"

"No, no, commandant, it will not come to *that*," said Gérard; "the army, as you say, will make itself heard, and unless it speaks according to Pichegru's dictionary, there is good hope that we shall not have worked and fought ourselves to death for ten years, only to have planted the flax ourselves, and let others spin it."

"Why, yes!" said the commandant, "we have not changed our coats without its costing us something."

"Well, then," said Captain Merle, "let us play the part of good patriots still here, and try to stop communications between our Chouans and La Vendée. For if they join, and England lends a hand, why, then, I will not answer for the cap of the Republic, one and indivisible."

At this point the owl's hoot, which sounded afar off, interrupted the conversation. The commandant, more anxious, scanned Marche-à-Terre anew, but his impassive countenance gave hardly even a sign of life. The conscripts, brought up by an officer, stood huddled like a herd of cattle in the middle of the road, some thirty paces from the company drawn up in order of battle. Last of all, ten paces further, were the soldiers and patriots under the orders of Lieutenant Lebrun. The commandant threw a glance over his array, resting it finally on the picket which he had posted in front. Satisfied with his dispositions, he was just turning round to give the word "March," when he caught sight of the tricolor cockades of the two soldiers who were coming back after searching the woods to the left. Seeing that the scouts on the right had not returned, he thought of waiting for them.

"Perhaps the bomb is going to burst there," he said to the two officers, pointing to the wood where his forlorn hope seemed to be buried.

While the two scouts made a kind of report to him, Hulot took his eyes off Marche-à-Terre. The Chouan thereupon set to whistling sharply in such a fashion as to send the sound to a prodigious distance; and then, before either of his watchers had been able even to take aim at him, he dealt them blows with his whip, which stretched them on the foot-path. At the same moment cries, or rather savage howls, surprised the Republicans: a heavy volley coming from the wood at the top of the slope where the Chouan had seated himself, laid seven or eight soldiers low; while Marche-à-Terre, at whom half a dozen useless shots were fired, disappeared in the thicket, after climbing the slope like a wildcat. As he did so his sabots dropped in the ditch, and they could easily see on his feet the stout hobnailed shoes which were usually worn by the "King's Huntsmen." No sooner had the Chouans given tongue than the whole of the conscripts dashed into the wood to the right, like flocks of birds which take to wing on the approach of a traveler.

"Fire on the rascals!" cried the commandant.

The company fired, but the conscripts had had the address to put themselves in safety by setting each man his back to a tree, and before the muskets could be reloaded they had vanished.

"Now talk of recruiting departmental legions, eh?" said Hulot to Gérard. "A man must be as great a fool as a Directory to count on levies from such a country as this! The Assembly would do better to vote us less, and give us more in uniforms, money, and stores."

"These are gentlemen who like their bannocks better than ammunition bread," said Beau-Pied, the wit of the company.

As he spoke hootings and shouts of derision from the Republican troops cried shame on the deserters; but silence fell again at once, as the soldiers saw, climbing painfully down the slope, the two light infantry men whom the commandant had sent to beat the wood to the right. The less severely wounded of the two was supporting his comrade, whose blood poured on the ground, and the two poor fellows had reached the middle of the descent when Marche-à-Terre showed his hideous face, and took such good aim at the two Blues that he hit them both with the same shot, and they dropped

heavily into the ditch. His great head had no sooner appeared than thirty barrels were raised, but like a figure in a fantasmagoria, he had already disappeared behind the terrible broom tufts. These incidents, which take so long in the telling, passed in a moment, and then, again in a moment, the patriots and the soldiers of the rear-guard effected a junction with the rest of the escort.

"Forward!" cried Hulot.

The company made its way quickly to the lofty and bare spot where the picket had been posted. There the commandant once more set the company in battle array; but he could see no further sign of hostility on the Chouans' part, and thought that the deliverance of the conscripts had been the only object of the ambuscade.

"I can tell by their shouts," said he to his two friends, "that there are not many of them. Let us quicken up. Perhaps we can gain Ernée without having them upon us."

The words were heard by a patriot conscript, who left the ranks and presented himself to Hulot.

"General," said he, "I have served in this war before as a counter-Chouan. May a man say a word to you?"

"'Tis a lawyer: these fellows always think themselves in court," whispered the commandant into Merle's ear. "Well, make your speech," said he to the young man of Fougères.

"Commandant, the Chouans have no doubt brought arms for the new recruits they have just gained. Now, if we budge, they will wait for us at every corner of the wood and kill us to the last man before we reach Ernée. We must make a speech, as you say, but it must be with cartridges. During the skirmish, which will last longer than you think, one of my comrades will go and fetch the National Guard and the Free Companies from Fougères. Though we are only conscripts, you shall see then whether we are kites and crows at fighting."

"You think there are many of the Chouans, then?"

"Look for yourself, citizen commandant."

He took Hulot to a spot on the plateau where the road-gravel had been disturbed as if with a rake, and then, after drawing his attention to this, he led him some way in front to a by-path where they saw traces of the passage of no small number of men, for the leaves were trodden right into the beaten soil.

"These are the *Gars* of Vitré," said the man of Fougères. "They have started to join the men of Lower Normandy."

"What is your name, citizen?" said Hulot.

"Gudin, commandant."

"Well, Gudin, I make you corporal of your townsfolk. You seem to be a fellow who can be depended on. Choose for yourself one of your comrades to send to Fougères. And you yourself stay by me. First, go with your requisitionaries and pick up the knapsacks, the guns, and the uniforms of our poor comrades whom the brigands have knocked over. You shall not stay here to stand gunshot without returning it."

So the bold men of Fougères went to strip the dead, and the whole company protected them by pouring a steady fire into the wood, so that the task of stripping was successfully performed without the loss of a single man.

"These Bretons," said Hulot to Gérard, "will make famous infantry if they can ever make up their minds to the pannikin."*

Gudin's messenger started at a run by a winding path in the wood to the left. The soldiers, busy in seeing to their weapons, made ready for the fight; and the commandant, after looking them over smilingly, took his station a few steps in front, with his two favorite officers, and waited stubbornly for the Chouans to attack. There was again silence for a while, but it did not last long. Three hundred Chouans, dressed in a similar fashion to the requisitionaries, debouched

* *Gamelle*, the joint soup-plate or bowl in which the rations of several French soldiers were served, and which has something of the traditional sacredness of the Janissary soup-kettle.

from the woods to the right, and occupied, after a disorderly fashion, and uttering shouts which were true wild-beast howls, the breadth of the road in front of the thin line of Blues. The commandant drew up his men in two equal divisions, each ten men abreast, placing between the two his dozen requisitionaries hastily equipped and under his own immediate command. The little army was guarded on the wings by two detachments, each twenty-five men strong, who operated on the two sides of the road under Gérard and Merle, and whose business it was to take the Chouans in flank, and prevent them from practicing the maneuver called in the country dialect *s'égailler*—that is to say, scattering themselves about the country, and each man taking up his own position so as best to shoot at the Blues without exposing himself; in which way of fighting the Republican troops were at their wits' end where to have their enemies.

These dispositions, which the commandant ordered with the promptitude suited to the circumstances, inspired the soldiers with the same confidence that he himself felt, and the whole body silently marched on the Chouans. At the end of a few minutes, the interval required to cover the space between the two forces, a volley at point-blank laid many low on both sides; but at the same moment the Republican wings, against which the Chouans had made no counter-movement, came up on the flank, and by a close and lively fire spread death and disorder amid the enemy to an extent which almost equalized the number of the two bodies. But there was in the character of the Chouans a stubborn courage which would stand any trial: they budged not a step, their losses did not make them waver; they closed up their broken ranks, and strove to surround the dark and steady handful of Blues, which occupied so little space that it looked like a queen bee in the midst of a swarm.

Then began one of those appalling engagements in which the sound of gunshot, scarcely heard at all, is replaced by the clatter of a struggle with the cold steel, in which men fight hand to hand and in which with equal courage the victory is decided simply by numbers. The Chouans would have carried the day at once if the wings under Merle and Gérard had not succeeded in raking their rear with more than one volley. The Blues who composed these wings ought to have held their position and continued to mark down their formidable adversaries; but, heated by the sight of the dangers which the brave detachment ran, completely surrounded as it was by the King's Huntsmen, they flung themselves madly on the road, bayonet in hand, and for a moment redressed the balance. Both sides then gave themselves up to the furious zeal, kindled by a wild and savage party spirit, which made this war unique. Each man, heedful of his own danger, kept absolute silence; and the whole scene had the grizzly coolness of death itself. Across the silence, broken only by the clash of arms and the crunching of the gravel, there came nothing else but the dull, heavy groans of those who fell to earth, dying, or wounded to the death. In the midst of the Republicans the requisitionaries defended the commandant, who was busied in giving counsel and command in all directions, so stoutly that more than once the regulars cried out, "Well done, recruits!" But Hulot, cool and watchful of everything, soon distinguished among the Chouans a man who, surrounded like himself by a few picked followers, seemed to be their leader. He thought it imperative that he should take a good look at the officer; but though again and again he tried in vain to note his features, the view was always barred by red bonnets or flapping hats. He could but perceive Marche-à-Terre, who, keeping by the side of his chief, repeated his orders in a harsh tone, and whose rifle was unceasingly active.

The commandant lost his temper at this continual disappointment, and, drawing his sword and cheering on the requisitionaries, charged the thickest of the Chouans so furiously that he broke through them, and was able to catch a glimpse of the chief, whose face was unluckily quite hidden by a huge flapped hat bearing the

white cockade. But the stranger, startled by the boldness of the attack, stepped backward, throwing up his hat sharply, and Hulot had the opportunity of taking brief stock of him. The young leader, whom Hulot could not judge to be more than five-and-twenty, wore a green cloth shooting-coat, and pistols were thrust in his white sash; his stout shoes were hob-nailed like those of the Chouans, while sporting gaiters rising to his knees, and joining breeches of very coarse duck, completed a costume which revealed a shape of moderate height, but slender and well proportioned. Enraged at seeing the Blues so near him, he slouched his hat and made at them; but he was immediately surrounded by Marche-à-Terre and some other Chouans alarmed for his safety. Yet Hulot thought he could see in the intervals left by the heads of those who thronged round the young man a broad red ribbon on a half-opened waistcoat. The commandant's eyes were attracted for a moment by this Royalist decoration, then entirely forgotten, but shifted suddenly to the face, which he lost from sight almost as soon, being driven by the course of the fight to attend to the safety and the movements of his little force. He thus saw but for a moment a pair of sparkling eyes, whose color he did not mark, fair hair, and features finely cut enough, but sunburned.

He was, however, particularly struck by the gleam of a bare neck whose whiteness was enhanced by a black cravat, loose, and carelessly tied. The fiery and spirited gestures of the young chief were soldierly enough, after the fashion of those who like to see a certain conventional romance in a fight. His hand, carefully gloved, flourished a sword-blade that flashed in the sun. His bearing displayed at once elegance and strength; and his somewhat deliberate excitement, set off as it was by the charms of youth and by graceful manners, made the emigrant leader a pleasing type of the French noblesse, and a sharp contrast with Hulot, who, at a pace or two from him, personified in his turn the vigorous Republic for which the old soldier fought, and whose stern face and blue uniform, faced with shabby red, the epaulets tarnished and hanging back over his shoulders, depicted not ill his character and his hardships.

The young man's air and his not ungraceful affectation did not escape Hulot, who shouted, as he tried to get at him: "Come, you opera-dancer there! come along and be thrashed!"

The royal chief, annoyed at his momentary check, rushed forward desperately; and no sooner had his men seen him thus risk himself, than they all flung themselves on the Blues.

But suddenly a clear, sweet voice made itself heard above the battle, "'Twas here that sainted Lescure died: will you not avenge him?" And at these words of enchantment the exertions of the Chouans became so terrible that the Republican soldiers had the greatest trouble in holding their ground without breaking ranks.

"Had he not been a youngster," said Hulot to himself, as he retreated step by step, "we should not have been attacked. Who ever heard of Chouans fighting a pitched battle? But so much the better: we shall not be killed like dogs along the roadside." Then raising his voice that it might up-echo along the woods, "Wake up, children!" he cried; "shall we let ourselves be bothered by brigands?"

The term by which we have replaced the word which the valiant commandant actually used is but a weak equivalent; but old hands will know how to restore the true phrase, which certainly has a more soldierly flavor.

"Gérard! Merle!" continued the commandant, "draw off your men! form them in column! fall back! fire on the dogs, and let us have done with them!"

But Hulot's order was not easy to execute; for, as he heard his adversary's voice, the young chief cried: "By Saint Anne of Auray! hold them fast! scatter yourselves, my *Gars!*"

And when the two wings commanded by Merle and Gérard left the main battle, each handful was followed by a determined band of Chouans much superior in numbers, and the stout old goatskins

surrounded the regulars on all sides, shouting anew their sinister and bestial howls.

"Shut up, gentlemen, please," said Beau-Pied; "we can't hear ourselves being killed."

The joke revived the spirits of the Blues. Instead of fighting in a single position, the Republicans continued their defense at three different spots on the plateau of the Pilgrim, and all its valleys, lately so peaceful, re-echoed with the fusillade. Victory might have remained undecided for hours, till the fight ceased for want of fighters, for Blues and Chouans fought with equal bravery and with rage constantly increasing on both sides, when the faint beat of a drum was heard afar off, and it was clear, from the direction of the sound, that the force which it heralded was crossing the valley of the Couësnon.

"'Tis the National Guard of Fougères!" cried Gudin, loudly; "Vannier must have met them."

At this cry, which reached the ears of the young Chouan chief and his fierce aide-de-camp, the Royalists made a backward movement, but it was promptly checked by a roar, as of a wild beast, from Marche-à-Terre. After a word of command or two given by the leader in a low voice and transmitted in Breton by Marche-à-Terre to the Chouans, they arranged their retreat with a skill which astonished the Republicans, and even the commandant. At the first word those in best condition fell into line and showed a stout front, behind which the wounded men and the rest retired to load. Then all at once, with the same agility of which Marche-à-Terre had before set the example, the wounded scaled the height which bounded the road on the right, and were followed by half the remaining Chouans, who, also climbing it smartly, manned the summit so as to show the Blues nothing but their bold heads.

Once there, they took the trees for breastworks, and leveled their guns at the remnant of the escort, who, on Hulot's repeated orders, had dressed their ranks quickly so as to show on the road itself a front not less than that of the Chouans still occupying it. These latter fell back slowly and fought every inch of ground, shifting so as to put themselves under their comrades' fire. As soon as they had reached the ditch, they in their turn escaladed the slope whose top their fellows held, and joined them after suffering without flinching the fire of the Republicans, who were lucky enough to fill the ditch with dead, though the men on the top of the scrap replied with a volley quite as deadly. At this moment the Fougères National Guard came up at a run to the battle-field, and its arrival finished the business. The National Guards and some excited regulars were already crossing the foot-path to plunge into the woods, when the commandant's martial voice cried to them: "Do you want to have your throats cut in there?"

So they rejoined the Republican force which had held the field, but not without heavy losses. All the old hats were stuck on the bayonet points, the guns were thrust aloft, and the soldiers cried with one voice and twice over, "Long live the Republic!" Even the wounded sitting on the roadsides shared the enthusiasm, and Hulot squeezed Gérard's hand, saying: "Eh! these are something like fellows!"

Merle was ordered to bury the dead in a ravine by the roadside; while other soldiers busied themselves with the wounded. Carts and horses were requisitioned from the farms round, and the disabled comrades were softly bedded in them on the strippings of the dead. But before departing, the Fougères National Guard handed over to Hulot a dangerously wounded Chouan. They had taken him prisoner at the foot of the steep slope by which his comrades had escaped, and on which he had slipped, betrayed by his flagging strength.

"Thanks for your prompt action, citizens," said the commandant. "God's thunder! but for you we should have had a bad time of it. Take care of yourselves: the war has begun. Farewell, my brave fellows!" Then Hulot turned to the prisoner. "What is your general's name?" asked he.

MARCHE-A-TERRE.

"The Gars."

"Who is that? Marche-à-Terre?"

"No! the Gars."

"Where did the Gars come from?"

At this question the King's Huntsman, his rough, fierce face stricken with pain, kept silence, told his beads, and began to say prayers.

"Of course the Gars is the young *ci-devant* with the black cravat; he was sent by the tyrant and his allies Pitt and Cobourg?"

But at these words the Chouan, less well informed than the commandant, raised his head proudly: "He was sent by God and the king!"

He said the words with an energy which exhausted his small remaining strength. The commandant saw that it was almost impossible to extract intelligence from a dying man, whose whole bearing showed his blind fanaticism, and turned his head aside with a frown. Two soldiers, friends of those whom Marche-à-Terre had so brutally dispatched with his whip on the side of the road (for indeed they lay dead there), stepped back a little, took aim at the Chouan, whose steady eyes fell not before the leveled barrels, fired point-blank at him, and he fell. But when they drew near to strip the corpse, he mustered strength to cry once more and loudly, "Long live the king!"

"Oh, yes, sly dog!" said Clef-des-Cœurs, "go and eat your bannocks at your good Virgin's table. To think of his shouting 'Long live the tyrant!' in our faces when we thought him done for!"

"Here, commandant," said Beau-Pied, "here are the brigand's papers."

"Hullo!" cried Clef-des-Cœurs again, "do come and look at this soldier of God with his stomach painted!"

Hulot and some of the men crowded round the Chouan's body, now quite naked, and perceived on his breast a kind of bluish tattoo-mark representing a burning heart, the mark of initiation of the Brotherhood of the *Sacred Heart*. Below the design Hulot could decipher the words "Marie Lambrequin," no doubt the Chouan's name. "You see that, Clef-des-Cœurs?" said Beau-Pied. "Well, you may guess for a month of Sundays before you find out the use of this accouterment."

"What do I know about the Pope's uniforms?" replied Clef-des-Cœurs.

"Wretched pad-the-hoof that you are!" retorted Beau-Pied; "will you never learn? Don't you see that they have promised the fellow resurrection, and that he has painted his belly that he may know himself again?"

At this sally, which had a certain ground of fact, Hulot himself could not help joining in the general laughter. By this time Merle had finished burying the dead, and the wounded had been, as best could be done, packed in two wagons by their comrades. The rest of the soldiers, forming without orders a double file on each side of the improvised ambulances, made their way down the side of the hill which faces Maine, and from which is seen the valley of the Pilgrim, a rival to that of the Couësnon in beauty. Hulot, with his two friends, Merle and Gérard, followed his soldiers at an easy pace, hoping to gain Ernée, where his wounded could be looked after without further mishap. The fight, though almost forgotten among the mightier events which were then beginning in France, took its name from the place where it had occurred, and attracted some attention, if not elsewhere, in the West, whose inhabitants, noting with care this new outbreak of hostilities, observed a change in the way in which the Chouans opened the new war. Formerly they would never have thought of attacking detachments of such strength. Hulot conjectured that the young Royalist he had seen must be the *Gars*, the new general sent to France by the royal family, who, after the fashion usual with the Royalist chiefs, concealed his style and title under one of the nicknames called *noms de guerre*.

The fact made the commandant not less thoughtful after his dearly-won victory than at the moment when he suspected the ambuscade. He kept turning back to look at the summit of the Pilgrim

which he was leaving behind, and whence there still came at intervals the muffled sound of the drums of the National Guard, who were descending the valley of the Couësnon just as the Blues were descending that of the Pilgrim.

"Can either of you," he said suddenly to his two friends, "guess the Chouans' motive in attacking us? They are business-like folk in dealing with gunshots, and I cannot see what they had to gain in this particular transaction. They must have lost at least a hundred men; and we," he added, hitching his right cheek and winking by way of a smile, "have not lost sixty. God's thunder! I do not see their calculation. The rascals need not have attacked us unless they liked: we should have gone along as quietly as a mail-bag, and I don't see what good it did them to make holes in our poor fellows." And he pointed sadly enough at the two wagon-loads of wounded. "Of course," he added, "it may have been mere politeness—a kind of 'good day to you!'"

"But, commandant, they carried off our hundred and fifty recruits," answered Merle.

"The conscripts might have hopped into the woods like frogs for all the trouble we should have taken to catch them," said Hulot, "especially after the first volley;" and he repeated, "No! no! there is something behind." Then, with yet another turn toward the hill, "There!" he cried, "look!"

Although the officers were now some way from the fatal plateau, they could easily distinguish Marche-à-Terre and some Chouans who had occupied it afresh.

"Quick march!" cried Hulot to his men; "stir your stumps, and wake up Shanks his mare! Are your legs frozen? have they turned Pitt-and-Cobourg men?"

The little force began to move briskly at these words and the commandant continued to the two officers: "As for this riddle, friends, which I can't make out, God grant the answer be not given in musket language at Ernée. I am much afraid of hearing that the communication with Mayenne has been cut again by the king's subjects."

But the problem which curled Commandant Hulot's mustache was at the same time causing quite as lively anxiety to the folk he had seen on the top of the Pilgrim. As soon as the drums of the National Guard died away, and the Blues were seen to have reached the bottom of the long descent, Marche-à-Terre sent the owl's cry cheerily out, and the Chouans reappeared, but in smaller numbers. No doubt, not a few were busy in looking to the wounded in the village of the Pilgrim, which lay on the face of the hill looking toward the Couësnon. Two or three leaders of the "King's Huntsmen" joined Marche-à-Terre, while, a pace or two away, the young nobleman, seated on a granite bowlder, seemed plunged in various thoughts, excited by the difficulty which his enterprise already presented. Marche-à-Terre made a screen with his hand to shade his sight from the sun's glare, and gazed in a melancholy fashion at the road which the Republicans were following across the Pilgrim valley. His eyes, small, black, and piercing, seemed trying to discover what was passing where the road began to climb again on the horizon of the valley.

"The Blues will intercept the mail!" said, savagely, one of the chiefs who was nearest Marche-à-Terre.

"In the name of Saint Anne of Auray," said another, "why did you make us fight? To save your own skin?"

Marche-à-Terre cast a venomous look at the speaker, and slapped the butt of his heavy rifle on the ground.

"Am I general?" he asked. Then, after a pause, "If you had all fought as I did, not one of those Blues," and he pointed to the remnant of Hulot's detachment, "would have escaped, and the coach might have been here now."

"Do you think," said a third, "that they would have even thought of escorting or stopping it, if we had let them pass quietly? You wanted to save your cursed skin, which was in danger because you did not think the Blues were on the road.

To save his bacon," continued the speaker, turning to the others, "he bled *us*, and we shall lose twenty thousand francs of good money as well!"

"Bacon yourself!" cried Marche-à-Terre, falling back, and leveling his rifle at his foe; "*you* do not hate the Blues; you only love the money. You shall die and be damned, you scoundrel! For you have not been to confession and communion this whole year!"

The insult turned the Chouan pale, and he took aim at Marche-à-Terre, a dull growl starting from his throat as he did so; but the young chief rushed between them, struck down their weapons with the barrel of his own rifle, and then asked for an explanation of the quarrel; for the conversation had been in Breton, with which he was not very familiar.

"My Lord Marquis," said Marche-à-Terre, when he had told him, "it is all the greater shame to find fault with me in that I left behind Pille-Miche, who will perhaps be able to save the coach from the thieves' claws after all," and he pointed to the Blues, who, in the eyes of these faithful servants of the throne and altar, were all assassins of Louis XVI., and all robbers as well.

"What!" cried the young man, angrily, "you are lingering here to stop a coach like cowards, when you might have won the victory in the first fight where I have led you? How are we to triumph with such objects as these? Are the defenders of God and the king common marauders? By Saint Anne of Auray! it is the Republic and not the mail that we make war on. Henceforward, a man who is guilty of such shameful designs shall be deprived of absolution, and shall not share in the honors reserved for the king's brave servants."

A low growl rose from the midst of the band, and it was easy to see that the chief's new-born authority, always difficult to establish among such undisciplined gangs, was likely to be compromised. The young man, who had not missed this demonstration, was searching for some means of saving the credit of his position, when the silence was broken by a horse's trot, and all heads turned in the supposed direction of the new-comer. It was a young lady mounted sidewise on a small Breton pony. She broke into a gallop, in order to reach the group of Chouans more quickly, when she saw the young man in their midst.

"What is the matter?" said she, looking from men to leader by turns.

"Can you believe it, madame?" said he, "they are lying in wait for the mail from Mayenne, with the intention of plundering it, when we have just fought a skirmish to deliver the *Gars* of Fougères, with heavy loss, but without having been able to destroy the Blues!"

"Well! what harm is there in that?" said the lady, whose woman's tact showed her at once the secret of the situation. "You have lost men; we can always get plenty more. The mail brings money, and we can never have enough of that. We will bury our brave fellows who are dead, and who will go to heaven; and we will take the money to put into the pockets of the other brave fellows who are alive. What is the difficulty?"

Unanimous smiles showed the approval with which the Chouans heard this speech.

"Is there nothing in it that brings a blush to your cheek?" asked the young man, in a low tone. "Are you so short of money that you must take it on the highway?"

"I want it so much, marquis, that I would pledge my heart for it," said she, with a coquettish smile, "if it were not in pawn already. But where have you been that you think you can employ Chouans without giving them plunder now and then at the Blues' expense? Don't you know the proverb 'thievish as an owl?' Remember what a Chouan is; besides," added she, louder, "is not the action just? have not the Blues taken all the Church's goods, and all our own?"

A second approving murmur, very different from the growl with which the Chouans had answered the marquis, greeted these words.

The young man's brow darkened, and, taking the lady aside, he said to her, with the sprightly vexation of a well-bred man,

"Are those persons coming to the Vivetière on the appointed day?"

"Yes," said she, "all of them; L'Intimé, Grand-Jacques, and perhaps Ferdinand."

"Then allow me to return thither, for I cannot sanction such brigandage as this by my presence. Yes, madame, I use the word brigandage. There is some nobility in being robbed; but—"

"Very well," said she, cutting him short, "I shall have your share, and I am much obliged to you for handing it over to me. The additional prize-money will suit me capitally. My mother has been so slow in sending me supplies, that I am nearly at my wits' end."

"Farewell!" cried the marquis, and he was on the point of vanishing. But the young lady followed him briskly. "Why will you not stay with me?" she said, with the glance, half imperious half caressing, by which women who have a hold over a man know how to express their will.

"Are you not going to rob a coach?"

"Rob!" replied she, "what a word! Allow me to explain to you—"

"No; you shall explain nothing," he said, taking her hands and kissing them with the easy gallantry of a courtier. And then, after a pause, "Listen: if I stay here while the mail is stopped, our fellows will kill me, for I shall—"

"No, you would not attempt to kill them," she said, quickly, "for they would bind you hand and foot with every respect due to your rank; and when they had levied on the Republicans the contribution necessary for their equipment, their food, and their powder, they would once more yield you implicit obedience."

"And yet you would have me command here? If my life is necessary to fight for the cause, let me at least keep the honor of my authority safe. If I retire, I can ignore this base act. I will come back and join you."

And he made off swiftly, the young lady listening to his footfalls with obvious vexation. When the rustle of the dry leaves gradually died away, she remained in perplexity for a moment. Then she quickly made her way back to the Chouans, and allowed a brusk expression of contempt to escape her, saying to Marche-à-Terre, who helped her to dismount. "That young gentleman would like to carry on war against the Republic with all the regular forms. Ah well! he will change his mind in a day or two. But how he has treated me!" she added, to herself, after a pause. She then took her seat on the rock, which had just before served the marquis as a chair, and silently awaited the arrival of the coach. She was not one of the least singular symptoms of the time, this young woman of noble birth, thrown by the strength of her passions into the struggle of monarchy against the spirit of the age, and driven by her sentiments into actions for which she was in a way irresponsible; as, indeed, were many others who were carried away by an excitement not seldom productive of great deeds. Like her, many other women played, in these disturbed times, the parts of heroines or of criminals. The Royalist cause had no more devoted, no more active servants than these ladies; but no virago of the party paid the penalty of excess of zeal, or suffered the pain of situations forbidden to the sex, more bitterly than this lady, as, sitting on her roadside bowlder, she was forced to accord admiration to the noble disdain and the inflexible integrity of the young chief. By degrees she fell into a deep reverie, and many sad memories made her long for the innocence of her early years, and regret that she had not fallen a victim to that Revolution whose victorious progress hands so weak as hers could not arrest.

The coach which had partly been the cause of the Chouan onslaught had left the little town of Ernée a few moments before the skirmish begun. Nothing better paints the condition of a country than the state of its social "plant," and thus considered, this vehicle itself deserves honorable mention. Even the Revolution had not been able to abolish it; indeed, it runs at this very day.* When Turgot

* August, 1827, when Balzac, twenty-eight years old, and twenty-eight years after date, wrote "The Chouans" at Fougères itself.

bought up the charter which a company had obtained under Louis XIV. for the exclusive right of serving passenger traffic all over the kingdom, and when he established the new enterprise of the so-called *turgotines*, the old coaches of Messieurs de Vousges, Chanteclaire, and the widow Lacombe were banished to the provinces

One of these wretched vehicles served the traffic between Mayenne and Fougères. Some feather-headed persons had baptized it antiphrastically a turgotine, either in imitation of Paris or in ridicule of an innovating minister. It was a ramskackle cabriolet on two very high wheels, and in its recesses two pretty stout persons would have had difficulty in ensconcing themselves. The scanty size of the frail trap forbidding heavy loads, and the inside of the coach-box being strictly reserved for the use of the mail, travelers, if they had any luggage, were obliged to keep it between their legs, already cramped in a tiny kind of boot shaped like a bellows. Its original color and that of its wheels presented an insoluble riddle to travelers. Two leathern curtains, difficult to draw despite their length of service, were intended to protect the sufferers against wind and rain; and the driver, perched on a box like those of the worst Parisian shandrydans, could not help joining in the travelers' conversation from his position between his two-legged and his four-legged victims. The whole equipage bore a fantastic likeness to a decrepit old man who has lived through any number of catarrhs and apoplexies, and from whom Death seems yet to hold his hand. As it traveled, it alternately groaned and creaked, lurching by turns forward and backward like a traveler heavy with sleep, as though it was pulling the other way to the rough action of two Breton ponies who dragged it over a sufficiently rugged road. This relic of by-gone ages contained three travelers, who, after leaving Ernée, where they had changed horses, resumed a conversation with the driver which had been begun before the end of the last stage.

"What do you mean by saying that Chouans have shown themselves hereabouts?" said the driver. "The Ernée people have just told me that Commandant Hulot has not left Fougères yet."

"Oh, oh! friend," said the youngest traveler, "you risk nothing but your skin. If you had, like me, three hundred crowns on you, and if you were known for a good patriot, you would not take things so quietly."

"Anyhow, you don't keep your own secrets," said the driver, shaking his head.

"Count your sheep, and the wolf will eat them," said the second traveler, who, dressed in black, and apparently some forty years old, seemed to be a rector of the district. His chin was double, and his rosy complexion was a certain sign of his ecclesiastical status. But though fat and short, he showed no lack of agility whenever there was need to get down from the vehicle or to get up again.

"Perhaps you are Chouans yourselves?" said the man with the three hundred crowns, whose ample goatskin-covered breeches of good cloth, and a clean waistcoat, resembled the garments of some well-to-do farmer. "By Saint Robespierre's soul! you shall have a warm reception, I promise you!" And his gray eyes traveled from the priest to the driver, as he pointed to a pair of pistols in his belt.

"Bretons are not afraid of those things," said the rector, contemptuously. "Besides, do we look like people who have designs on your money?"

Every time the word "money" was mentioned, the driver became silent, and the rector was sufficiently wide-awake to suspect that the patriot had no crowns at all, and that their conductor was in charge of some.

"Are you well loaded to-day, Coupiau?" said the priest.

"Oh, Monsieur Gudin! I have nothing worth speaking of," answered the driver. But the Abbé Gudin, considering the countenances of the patriot and Coupiau, perceived that they were equally undisturbed at the answer.

"So much the better for you," retorted the patriot; "I can then take my own

means to protect my own property in case of ill-fortune."

But Coupiau rebelled at this cool announcement as to taking the law into the patriot's own hands, and answered roughly:

"I am master in my coach, and provided I drive you—"

"Are you a patriot, or are you a Chouan?" said his opponent, interrupting him sharply.

"I am neither one nor the other," replied Coupiau. "I am a postilion; and what is more, I am a Breton—therefore I fear neither the Blues nor the gentlemen."

"The gentlemen of the road, you mean," sneered the patriot.

"Nay, they only take back what has been taken from them," said the rector, quickly; and the two travelers stared each other straight in the face, to speak vernacularly. But there was in the interior of the coach a third passenger, who during this altercation observed the deepest silence, neither the driver, nor the patriot, nor even Guidin paying the least attention to such a dummy. Indeed, he was one of those unsociable and impracticable travelers who journey like a calf carried unresistingly, with its legs tied, to the nearest market, who begin by occupying at least their full legal room, and end by lolling asleep, without any false modesty, on their neighbors' shoulders. The patriot, Gudin, and the driver had therefore left the man to himself on the strength of his sleep, after perceiving that it was useless to talk to one whose stony countenance indicated a life passed in measuring out yards of linen, and an intelligence busied only in selling them as much as possible over cost price. A fat little man, curled up in his corner, he from time to time opened his china-blue eyes and rested them on each speaker in turn during the discussion, with expressions of alarm, doubt, and mistrust. But he seemed only to be afraid of his fellow-travelers, and to care little for the Chouans; while when he looked at the driver it was as though one freemason looked at another. At this moment the firing on the Pilgrim began. Coupiau, with a startled air, pulled up his horses.

"Oh, oh!" said the priest, who seemed to know what he was talking about, "that means hard fighting, and plenty of men at it."

"Yes, Monsieur Gudin. But the puzzle is, who will win?" said Coupiau; and this time all faces seemed equally anxious.

"Let us put up the coach," said the patriot, "at the inn over there, and hide it till we know the result of the battle."

This seemed such prudent advice that Coupiau yielded to it, and the patriot helped the driver to stow the coach away from all eyes, behind a fagot stack. But the supposed priest seized an opportunity of saying to Coupiau:

"Has he really got money?"

"Eh! Monsieur Gudin, if what he has were in your reverence's pockets, they would not be heavy."

The Republicans, in their hurry to gain Ernée, passed in front of the inn without halting; and at the sound of their march, Gudin and the innkeeper, urged by curiosity, came out of the yard gate to look at them. All of a sudden the plump priest ran to a soldier, who was somewhat behind.

"What, Gudin!" he said, "are you going with the Blues, you obstinate boy? what are you thinking of?"

"Yes, uncle," answered the corporal, "I have sworn to defend France."

"But, miserable man, you are risking your soul!" said the uncle, trying to arouse in his nephew those religious sentiments which are so strong in a Breton's heart.

"Uncle, if the king had taken the head of the army himself, I don't say but—"

"Who is talking of the king, silly boy? will your Republic give you a fat living? It has upset everything. What career do you expect? Stay with us; we shall win sooner or later, and you shall have a counselor's place in some parliament or other."

"A parliament!" cried Gudin, scornfully. "Good-by, uncle."

"You shall not have three louis' worth

from me," said the angry uncle; "I will disinherit you!"

"Thanks!" said the Republican; and they parted.

The fumes of some cider with which the patriot had regaled Coupiau while the little troop passed, had succeeded in muddling the driver's brains; but he started up joyfully when the innkeeper, after learning the result of the struggle, announced that the Blues had got the better. He set off once more with his coach, and the vehicle was not long in showing itself at the bottom of the Pilgrim valley, where, like a piece of wreckage floating after a storm, it could easily be seen from the high ground, both of Maine and Brittany.

Hulot, as he reached the top of a rising ground which the Blues were climbing, and whence the Pilgrim was still visible in the distance, turned back to see whether the Chouans were still there; and the sun flashing on their gun-barrels, showed them to him like dots of light. As he threw a last look over the valley which he was just leaving for that of Ernée, he thought he could see Coupiau's coach and horses on the high road.

"Is not that the Mayenne coach?" he asked his two friends; and the officers, gazing at the old turgotine, recognized it easily.

"Well!" said Hulot, "why did we not meet it?" They looked at each other silently. "Another puzzle!" cried the commandant; "but I think I begin to understand."

At that moment Marche-à-Terre, who also knew the turgotine well, signaled it to his comrades, and then shouts of general joy woke the strange young lady from her reverie. She came forward, and saw the vehicle bowling along with fatal swiftness from the other side of the Pilgrim. The unlucky turgotine soon reached the plateau, and the Chouans, who had hid themselves anew, pounced on their prey with greedy haste. The silent traveler slipped to the coach floor and shrunk out of sight, trying to look like a parcel of goods.

"Aha!" cried Coupiau from his box, pointing at his peasant passenger. "You have scented this patriot, have you? He has a bag full of gold."

But the Chouans greeted his words with a roar of laughter, and shouted "Pille-Miche! Pille-Miche! Pille-Miche!"

In the midst of the hilarity which Pille-Miche himself, as it were, echoed, Coupiau climbed shamefacedly from his box. But when the famous Cibot, nicknamed Pille-Miche, helped his neighbor to get down, a respectful murmur was raised. "'Tis Abbé Gudin!" cried several, and at this honored name every hat went off. The Chouans bent the knee before the priest and begged his blessing, which he gave them with solemnity.

"He would outwit Saint Peter himself, and filch the keys of Paradise!" said the rector, clapping Pille-Miche on the shoulder. "But for him the Blues would have intercepted us." But then, seeing the young lady, the Abbé Gudin went to talk to her a few paces apart. Marche-à-Terre, who had promptly opened the box of the cabriolet, discovered with savage glee a bag whose shape promised rouleaux of gold. He did not waste much time in making the division, and each Chouan received the part that fell to him with such exactitude that the partition did not excite the least quarrel. Then he came forward to the young lady and the priest, offering them about six thousand francs.

"May I take this with a safe conscience, Monsieur Gudin?" said she, feeling in need of some approval to support her.

"Why, of course, madame! Did not the Church formerly approve the confiscation of the Protestants' goods? Much more should she approve it in the case of the Revolutionists who renounce God, destroy chapels, and persecute religion." And he added example to precept by accepting without the least scruple the new kind of tithe which Marche-à-Terre offered him. "Besides," said he, "I can now devote all my goods to the defense of God and the king. My nephew has gone off with the Blues."

Meanwhile, Coupiau was bewailing his fate, and declaring that he was a ruined man.

"Come with us," said Marche-à-Terre; "you shall have your share."

"But they will think that I have let myself be robbed on purpose if I return without any violence having been offered me."

"Oh, is that all?" said Marche-à-Terre.

He gave the word, and a volley riddled the turgotine. At this sudden discharge there came from the old coach so lamentable a howl that the Chouans, naturally superstitious, started back with fright. But Marche-à-Terre had caught sight of the pallid face of the silent passenger rising from, and then falling back into, a corner of the coach body.

"There is still a fowl in your coop," he whispered to Coupiau, and Pille-Miche, who understood the remark, winked knowingly.

"Yes," said the driver, "but I make it a condition of my joining you that you shall let me take the good man safe and sound to Fougères. I swore to do so by the Holy Saint of Auray."

"Who is he?" asked Pille-Miche.

"I cannot tell you," answered Coupiau.

"Let him alone," said Marche-à-Terre, jogging Pille-Miche's elbow; "he has sworn by Saint Anne of Auray, and he must keep his promise. But," continued the Chouan, addressing Coupiau, "do not you go down the hill too fast; we will catch you up on business. I want to see your passenger's phiz, and then we will give him a passport."

At that moment a horse's gallop was heard, the sound nearing rapidly from the Pilgrim side, and soon the young chief appeared. The lady hastily concealed the bag she held in her hand.

"You need have no scruple in keeping that money," said the young man, drawing her arm forward again. "Here is a letter from your mother which I found among those waiting for me at the Vivetière." He looked by turns at the Chouans who were disappearing in the woods and the coach which was descending the valley of the Couësnon, and added, "For all the haste I made, I did not come up in time. Heaven grant I may be deceived in my suspicions."

"It is my poor mother's money!" cried the lady, after opening the letter, the first lines of which drew the exclamation from her. There was a sound of stifled laughter from the woods, and even the young chief could not help laughing as he saw her clutching the bag containing her own share of the plunder of her own money. Indeed, she began to laugh herself.

"Well, marquis," said she to the chief, "God be praised! At any rate I come off blameless this time."

"Will you never be serious, not even in remorse?" said the young man.

She blushed and looked at the marquis with an air so truly penitent that it disarmed him. The abbé politely, but with a rather doubtful countenance, restored the tithe which he had just accepted, and then followed the chief, who was making his way to the by-path by which he had come. Before joining them the young lady made a sign to Marche-à-Terre, who came up to her.

"Go and take up your position in front of Mortagne," she said, in a low voice. "I know that the Blues are going to send almost immediately a great sum in cash to Alencon to defray the expenses of preparing for war. If I give up to-day's booty to our comrades, it is on condition that they take care to make up my loss. But above all things take care that the Gars knows nothing of the object of this expedition; he would very likely oppose it. If things go wrong, I will appease him."

"Madame," said the marquis, whose horse she mounted behind him, giving her own to the abbé, "my friends at Paris write to bid us look to ourselves, for the Republic will try to fight us underhand, and by trickery."

"They might do worse," said she. "The rascals are clever. I shall be able to take a part in the war, and find opponents of my own stamp."

"Not a doubt of it," cried the marquis. "Pichegru bids me be very cautious and circumspect in making acquaintances of

every kind. The Republic does me the honor of thinking me more dangerous than all the Vendeans put together, and counts on my foibles to get hold of me."

"Would you distrust *me?*" she said, patting his heart with the hand by which she clung to him.

"If I did, would you be there, madame?" answered he, and turned toward her his forehead, which she kissed.

"Then," said the abbé, "we have more to fear from Fouché's police than from the battalions of mobiles, and the Anti-Chouans?"

"Exactly, your reverence."

"Aha!" said the lady, "Fouché is going to send women against you, is he? I shall be ready for them," she added, in a voice deeper than usual, and after a slight pause.

Some three or four gunshots off from the waste plateau which the leaders were now leaving, there was passing at the moment one of those scenes which, for some time to come, became not uncommon on the highways. On the outskirts of the little village of the Pilgrim, Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre had once more stopped the coach at a spot where the road dipped. Coupiau had left his box after a slight resistance; and the silent passenger, extracted from his hiding-place by the two Chouans, was on his knees in a broom thicket.

"Who are you?" asked Marche-à-Terre, in a sinister tone.

The traveler held his peace till Pille-Miche recommenced his examination with a blow from the butt of his gun.

"I am," he said, glancing at Coupiau, "Jacques Pinaud, a poor linen merchant." But Coupiau, who did not think that he broke his word by so doing, shook his head. The gesture enlightened Pille-Miche, who took aim at the traveler, while Marche-à-Terre laid before him in plain terms this alarming ultimatum:

"You are too fat for a poor man with a poor man's cares. If you give us the trouble of asking your real name once more, my friend Pille-Miche here will earn the esteem and gratitude of your heirs by one little gun-shot. Who are you?" he added, after a brief interval.

"I am D'Orgemont, of Fougères."

"Aha!" cried the Chouans.

"*I* did not tell your name, M. d'Orgemont," said Coupiau. "I call the Holy Virgin to witness that I defended you bravely."

"As you are *Monsieur* d'Orgemont, of Fougères," went on Marche-à-Terre, with a mock-respectful air, "you shall be let go quite quietly. But as you are neither a good Chouan nor a true Blue (though you did buy the estates of Juvigny Abbey), you shall pay us," said the Chouan, in the tone of a man who is counting up his comrades, "three hundred crowns of six francs each as a ransom. That is not too much to pay for the privilege of being neutral."

"Three hundred crowns of six francs!" repeated the luckless banker, Pille-Miche, and Coupiau in chorus, but each in very different tones.

"Alas! my dear sir," said D'Orgemont, "I am a ruined man. The forced loan of one hundred millions levied by this devilish Republic, which assesses me at terrible rates, has drained me dry."

"And pray, how much did the Republic ask of you?"

"A thousand crowns, dear sir," said the banker, in a lamentable tone, hoping to be let off something.

"If the Republic borrows such large sums from you, and forces you to pay them, you must see that your interest lies with us, whose government is less expensive. Do you mean to say that three hundred crowns is too much to pay for your skin?"

"But where am I to get them?"

"Out of your strong-box," said Pille-Miche; "and take care your crowns are not clipped, or we will clip your nails in the fire for you."

"But where am I to pay them?" asked D'Orgemont.

"Your country house at Fougères is close to the farm of Gibarry, where dwells my cousin Galope-Chopine, otherwise called Long Cibot. You shall pay them to him," said Pille-Miche.

"But that is not business," said D'Orgemont.

"What do we care for that?" replied Marche-à-Terre. "Remember that if the crowns are not paid to Galope-Chopine in fifteen days' time, we will pay you a little visit which will cure you of gout, if you have got it in your feet. As for you, Coupiau," continued he, turning to the conductor, "your name henceforth shall be Mène-à-Bien." And with these words the two Chouans departed, and the traveler climbed up again into the coach, which Coupiau, whipping up his steeds, drove rapidly toward Fougères.

"If you had been armed," said Coupiau, "we might have made a little better fight of it."

"Silly fellow," said D'Orgemont, "I have got ten thousand francs there," and he pointed to his great shoes. "Is it worth fighting when one has such a sum on one as that?"

Mène-à-Bien scratched his ear and looked backward, but all trace of his new friends had disappeared.

Hulot and his soldiers halted at Ernée to deposit the wounded in the hospital of the little town; and then, without any further inconvenient incident interrupting the march of the Republican force, made their way to Mayenne. There the commandant was able next day to put an end to his doubts about the progress of the mail; for the townsfolk received news of the robbery of the coach.

A few days later the authorities brought into Mayenne numbers of patriot conscripts, sufficient to enable Hulot to fill up the ranks of his demi-brigade. But there soon followed disquieting reports as to the insurrection. There was complete revolt at every point where, in the last war, the Chouans and Vendeans had established the principal centers of their outbreak. In Brittany, the Royalists had seized Pontorson, so as to open communications with the sea. They had taken the little town of Saint James, between Pontorson and Fougères, and seemed disposed to make it for the time their place of arms, a headquarters of their magazines and of their operations, from which without danger they could correspond both with Normandy and Morbihan. The inferior leaders were scouring these districts with the view of exciting the partisans of monarchy, and arranging, if possible, a systematic effort. These machinations were reported at the same time as news from La Vendée, where similar intrigues were stirring up the country, under the direction of four famous leaders, the Abbé Vernal, the Comte de Fontaine, Monsieur de Chatillon, and Monsieur Suzannet. The Chevalier de Valois, the Marquis d'Esgrignon, and the Troisvilles acted, it was said, as their agents in the department of the Orne. But the real chief of the extensive scheme which was unfolding itself, slowly but in an alarming fashion, was "The Gars," a nickname given by the Chouans to the Marquis de Montauran as soon as he had landed.

The information sent to the Government by Hulot turned out correct in every particular. The authority of the chief sent from abroad had been at once acknowledged. Indeed, the marquis was acquiring sufficient influence over the Chouans to enable him to give them a glimmering of the true objects of the war, and to persuade them that the excesses of which they had been guilty were tarnishing the noble cause to which they devoted themselves. The bold temper, the courage, the coolness, the ability of this young lord revived the hopes of the Republic's enemies, and administered so lively an impulse to the gloomy fanaticism of the district, that even lukewarm partisans labored to bring about results decisive in favor of the stricken monarchy. Meanwhile, Hulot received no answer to the repeated demands and reports which he kept sending to Paris, and this astounding silence boded beyond doubt some crisis in the fortunes of the Republic.

"Can it be now," said the old chief to his friends, "with the Government as it is with men who are dunned for money? do they put all demands in the waste-paper basket?"

But before long there spread the rumor

of the return, as if by enchantment, of General Bonaparte, and of the events of the 18th Brumaire, and the military commanders in the West were not slow to understand the silence of the ministers. Nevertheless, these commanders were only the more impatient to get rid of the responsibility which weighed on them, and felt a lively curiosity to know what measures the new Government would take. When they learned that General Bonaparte had been appointed First Consul of the Republic, the soldiers felt keen pleasure, seeing for the first time one of their own men promoted to the management of affairs. All France, which idolized the young general, trembled with hope, and the national energy revived. The capital, weary of dullness and gloom, gave itself up to the festivals and amusements of which it had so long been deprived. The earlier acts of the consulate disappointed no expectations, and Freedom felt no qualms. Soon the First Consul addressed a proclamation to the inhabitants of the West, one of those eloquent allocutions directed to the masses which Bonaparte had, so to say, invented, and which produced in those days of prodigious patriotism effects altogether miraculous. His voice echoed through the world like that of a prophet; for as yet no one of these manifestoes had failed to be confirmed by victory. Thus it ran:

"DWELLERS IN THE WEST:—

"For the second time an impious war has set your departments in a flame.

"The authors of these troubles are traitors who have sold themselves to the English, or brigands who seek in civil disorder nothing but occasion and immunity for their crimes.

"To such men Government can neither show clemency nor even make a declaration of its own principles.

"But there are some citizens still dear to their country who have been seduced by the artifices of these men, and these citizens deserve enlightenment and the communication of the truth.

"Some unjust laws have been decreed and put in execution; some arbitrary acts have disturbed the citizens' sense of personal safety and their liberty of conscience; everywhere the rash insertion of names in the list of emigrants has done harm to patriots: in short, the great principles of social order have been violated.

"The consuls therefore make known that, freedom of worship having been decreed by the Constitution, the law of the 11th Prairial, year III., which grants to all citizens the use of edifices intended for religious worship, will be put in force.

"The Government will show mercy: it will extend to the repentant an entire and absolute indemnity. But it will strike down all those who after this announcement dare to continue resistance to the sovereignty of the people."

"Quite paternal, is it not?" said Hulot, after this consular allocution had been publicly read; "yet, you will see, not one Royalist brigand will be converted by it."

The commandant was right, and the proclamation did nothing but attach each partisan more strongly to his own party. A few days later, Hulot and his colleagues received re-enforcements; and the new Minister of War sent information that General Brune had been appointed to the command of the forces in the West of France, while Hulot, whose experience was well known, had provisional authority in the departments of Orne and Mayenne. Soon a hitherto unknown activity set all the springs of administration working. A circular from the Minister of War and the Minister of General Police announced that vigorous measures, the execution of which was intrusted to the heads of the military, had been taken to stifle the insurrection at its source. But the Chouans and the Vendeans had already profited by the sluggishness of the Republic to raise the country and to gain complete possession of it. Accordingly, a new consular proclamation was launched, addressed this time to the troops:

"SOLDIERS:—

"There are now in the West no enemies but bandits, emigrants, and the hirelings of England.

"The army consists of more than sixty thousand gallant men: let me learn soon that the rebel chiefs are no more. Glory is to be gained by toil: who would be without it if it were to be won by keeping to barracks in the cities?

"Soldiers, no matter what your rank in the army may be, the gratitude of the nation awaits you! To deserve it you must brave the inclemency of the seasons, ice, snow, the bitter cold of night; you must surprise your enemies at break of day, and put the wretches, the scandal of France, to the sword!

"Let your campaign be brief and successful; give no mercy to the bandits, but observe the strictest discipline.

"National Guards! let the effort of your arms be joined to that of the troops of the line.

"If you know of any men among you who are partisans of the bandits, arrest them! Let them find nowhere any shelter from the pursuing soldier; and if there be any traitors who dare to harbor and defend them, let both perish together!"

"What a fellow!" cried Hulot. "It is just as it was in Italy: he rings the bell for mass, and says it, all by himself. That is the way to talk."

"Yes; but he talks by himself and in his own name," said Gérard, who was beginning to dread what might come of the 18th Brumaire.

"Odds, sentries and sentry-boxes!" said Merle. "What does that matter, since he is a soldier?"

A few paces off, some of the rank and file were clustering round the proclamation which was stuck on the wall. Now, as not a man of them could read, they gazed at it, some indifferently, others curiously, while two or three scanned the passers-by for a citizen who looked learned.

"Come, Clef-des-Cœurs," said Beau-Pied mockingly to his comrade, "what does that rag there say?"

"It is easy to guess," answered Clef-des-Cœurs. And as he spoke all looked at the pair, who were always ready to play each his part.

"Look there!" continued Clef-des-Cœurs, pointing to a rough cut at the head of the proclamation, where for some days past a compass had replaced the level of 1793. "It means that we fellows have got to step out. They have stuck a compass* open on it for an emblem."

"My boy, don't play the learned man; it is not 'emblem,' but 'problem.' I served first with the gunners," said Beau-Pied, "and the officers were busy about nothing else."

"'Tis an emblem!" "'Tis a problem!" "Let us have a bet on it." "What?" "Your German pipe." "Done!"

"Ask your pardon, adjutant, but is it not 'emblem,' and not 'problem?'" said Clef-des-Cœurs to Gérard, who was thoughtfully following Hulot and Merle.

"'Tis both one and the other," said he, gravely.

"The adjutant is making game of us," said Beau-Pied. "The paper means that our General of Italy is made Consul (a fine commission!) and that we shall get greatcoats and boots!"

II.

A NOTION OF FOUCHÉ'S.

TOWARD the end of the month of Brumaire, while Hulot was superintending the morning drill of his demi-brigade, the whole of which had been drawn together at Mayenne by orders from headquarters, an express from Alencon delivered to him certain dispatches, during the reading of which very decided vexation showed itself on his face.

"Well, then, to business!" cried he, somewhat ill-temperedly, thrusting the papers in the crown of his hat. "Two companies are to set out with me and march toward Mortagne. The Chouans are about there. You will come with me," said he to Merle and Gérard. "May they make a noble of me if I understand

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* This refers to the French idiom, *ouvrir le compas*, meaning "Stir the stumps," "Step out."

a word of my dispatches! I dare say I am only a fool. But never mind! let us get to work; there is no time to lose."

"Why, commandant, is there any very savage beast in the game-bag there?" asked Merle, pointing to the official envelope of the dispatch.

"God's thunder! there is nothing at all, except that they are bothering us!"

When the commandant let slip this military expression (or rather for which, as mentioned before, we have substituted it), it always pointed to bad weather; and its various intonations made up, as it were, a series of degrees which acted as a thermometer of their chief's temper to the demi-brigade. Indeed, the old soldier's frankness had made the interpretation so easy that the sorriest drummer-boy in the regiment soon knew his Hulot by heart, thanks to mere observation of the changes in the grimace with which the commandant cocked his cheek and winked his eye. This time the tone of sullen wrath with which he accompanied the word made his two friends silent and watchful. The very pock-marks which pitted his martial visage seemed to deepen, and his complexion took a browner tan. It had happened that his mighty plaited pigtail had fallen forward on one of his epaulets when he put on his cocked hat, and Hulot jerked it back with such rage that the curls were all disordered. Yet, as he stood motionless, with clenched fists, his arms folded on his breast, and his mustache bristling, Gérard ventured to ask him, "Do we start at once?"

"Yes, if the cartridge-boxes are full," growled Hulot.

"They are."

"Shoulder arms! File to the left! Forward! March!" said Gérard, at a sign from the chief.

The drummers placed themselves at the head of the two companies pointed out by Gérard: and as the drums began to beat, the commandant, who had been plunged in thought, seemed to wake up, and left the town, accompanied by his two friends, to whom he did not address a word. Merle and Gérard looked at each other several times without speaking, as if to ask, "Will he sulk with us long?" and as they marched, they stole glances at Hulot, who was still growling unintelligible words between his teeth. Several times the soldiers heard him swearing; but not one of them opened his lips, for, at the right time, they all knew how to observe the stern discipline to which the troops who had served under Bonaparte in Italy had become accustomed. Most of them were, like Hulot himself, relics of the famous battalions that capitulated at Mayence on a promise that they should not be employed on the frontiers, and who were called in the army the "Mayençais;" nor would it have been easy to find officers and men who understood each other better.

On the day following that on which they set out, Hulot and his friends found themselves at early morning on the Alençon road, about a league from that city, in the direction of Mortagne, where the road borders meadows watered by the Sarthe. Over these a succession of picturesque landscapes opens to the left, while the right side, composed of thick woods which join on to the great forest of Menil-Broust, sets off (if we may use the painter's term) the softer views of the river. The footpaths at the edge of the road are shut in by ditches, the earth of which, constantly turned up toward the fields, produces high slopes crowned by *ajoncs*, as they call the thorny broom throughout the West. This shrub, which branches out in thick bushes, affords during the winter capital fodder for horses and cattle; but, before its harvest, the Chouans used to hide behind its dark-green tufts. These slopes and their *ajoncs*, which tell the traveler that he is drawing near Brittany, made this part of the road at that time as hazardous as it is still beautiful.

The dangers which were likely to be met in the journey from Mortagne to Alençon, and from Alençon to Mayenne, were the cause of Hulot's expedition; and at this very point the secret of his wrath at last escaped him. He was acting as escort to an old mail-coach drawn by post-horses, whose pace the weariness of his own soldiers kept to a slow walk. The companies

of Blues (forming part of the garrison of Mortagne) which had escorted this wretched vehicle to the limits of their own appointed district, where Hulot had come to relieve them, were already on their way home, and appeared afar off like black dots. One of the old Republican's own companies was placed a few paces behind the coach, and the other in front of it. Hulot, who was between Merle and Gérard, about half-way between the coach and the vanguard, suddenly said to them:

"A thousand thunders! Would you believe that the general packed us off from Mayenne to dance attendance on the two petticoats in this old wagon?"

"But, commandant," answered Gérard, "when we took up our post, an hour ago, with the citizenesses, you bowed to them quite politely!"

"There is just the shame of it! Don't these Paris dandies request us to show the greatest respect to their d——d females? To think that they should insult good and brave patriots like us by tying us to the tail of a woman's skirt! For my part, you know, I run straight myself, and do not like dodgings in others. When I saw Danton with his mistresses, Barras with his, I told them, 'Citizens, when the Republic set you to govern, she did not mean to license the games of the old régime.' You will reply that women—oh! one must have women, of course! Brave fellows deserve women, and good women, too. But it is no use chattering when there is mischief at hand. What was the good of making short work of the abuses of the old days, if patriots are to start them afresh? Look at the First Consul: there is a man for you; no women about him, always attending to his business. I would bet the left side of my mustache that he knows nothing of the absurd work we are made to do here."

"Upon my word, commandant," answered Merle, laughing, "I caught just a glimpse of the young lady hidden in the coach, and it is my opinion that it is no shame for any man to feel, as I do, a longing to approach that carriage and exchange a few words with the travelers."

"Beware, Merle," said Gérard; "the dames are accompanied by a citizen clever enough to catch you in a trap."

"Who do you mean? that *incroyable*, whose little eyes are constantly shifting from one side to the other as if he saw Chouans everywhere? that musk-scented idiot, whose legs are so short you can scarcely see them, and who, when his horse's legs are hidden by the carriage, looks like a duck with its head protruding from a game pie? If that booby prevents me caressing his pretty nightingale—"

"Duck, nightingale! Oh! my poor Merle, you were always feather-headed. But look out for the duck: his green eyes appear to me as treacherous as those of a viper, and as keen as those of a woman who pardons her husband his infidelities. I am less suspicious of the Chouans than I am of those lawyers whose figures look like lemonade bottles."

"Bah!" retorted Merle, gayly, "with the permission of the commandant, I will run the risk. That woman has eyes like stars, and one may well venture everything to gaze into them."

"Our comrade is caught," said Gérard to the commandant; "he is beginning to talk nonsense."

Hulot made a grimace, shrugged his shoulders, and answered: "Before taking the soup, I advise him to taste it."

"Dear old Merle," said Gérard, judging from his lagging steps that he was maneuvering to gradually reach the coach, "what good spirits he has! He is the only man who could laugh at the death of a comrade without being taxed with want of feeling."

"He is the true type of a French soldier," remarked Hulot, gravely.

"Oh! he is one who wears his epaulets upon his shoulders to let the people see that he is a captain," exclaimed Gérard, laughing; "as if rank made any difference."

The carriage toward which the officer was making his way, contained two women, one of whom appeared to be the servant of the other.

A thin, dried-up little man galloped

sometimes before, sometimes behind the carriage, but although he seemed to accompany the two privileged travelers, no one saw him address a word to them. This silence, a mark of contempt, or respect, the numerous pieces of luggage, and the band-boxes of the one whom the commandant called a princess—all, even to the costume of the attendant cavalier, again roused Hulot's bile. The costume of this unknown presented an exact picture of the fashion which at that time called forth the caricatures of the Incroyables. Imagine a person muffled in a coat so short in front that there showed beneath five or six inches of the waistcoat, and with skirts so long behind that they resembled a codfish tail, a term then commonly employed to designate them. An immense cravat formed round his neck such innumerable folds that the little head, emerging from a labyrinth of muslin, almost justified Captain Merle's kitchen simile.

The stranger wore tight breeches, and boots a la Suwarrow; a huge white and blue cameo was stuck, as a pin, in his shirt. Two watch-chains hung in parallel festoons at his waist; and his hair, hanging in corkscrew curls on each side of the face, almost hid his forehead. Finally, as a last touch of decoration, the collars of his shirt and his coat rose so high that his head presented the appearance of a bouquet in its paper wrapping. If there be added to these insignificant details, which formed a mass of disparities with no ensemble, the absurd contrast of his yellow breeches, his red waistcoat, his cinnamon-brown coat, a faithful portrait will be given of the height of fashion at which dandies aimed at the beginning of the Consulate. Preposterous as the costume was, it seemed to have been invented as a sort of touchstone of elegance to show that nothing can be too absurd for fashion to hallow it. The rider appeared full thirty years old, though he was not in reality more than twenty-two —an appearance due perhaps to hard living, perhaps to the dangers of the time. Yet, though he was dressed like a mountebank, his air announced a certain polish of manners which revealed the well-bred man. No sooner did the captain approach the carriage than the dandy seemed to guess his purpose, and facilitated it by checking his horse's pace; Merle, who had cast a sarcastic glance at him, being met by one of those impassive faces which the vicissitudes of the Revolution had taught to hide even the least emotion. As soon as the ladies perceived the slouched corner of the captain's old cocked hat, and his epaulets, an angelically sweet voice asked:

"Sir officer! will you have the kindness to tell us at what point of the road we are?"

A question from an unknown traveler, and that traveler a woman, always has a singular charm, and her least word seems to promise an adventure; but if the lady appears to ask protection, relying on her weakness and her ignorance of facts, where is the man who is not slightly inclined to build a castle in the air, with a happy ending for himself? So the words, "Monsieur l'officier," and the ceremonious form of the question, excited a strange disturbance in the captain's heart. He tried to see what the fair traveler was like, and was completely baffled, a jealous veil hiding her features from him; he could hardly see even the eyes, though they flashed through the gauze like two onyx stones caught by the sun.

"You are now a league distant from Alencon, madame," said he.

"Alencon, already?" And the unknown lady threw herself, or let herself fall back in the carriage, without further reply.

"Alencon?" repeated the other girl, as if waking from sleep; "you will see our country again—"

She looked at the captain, and held her peace. But Merle, finding himself deceived in his hope of seeing the fair stranger, set himself to scan her companion. She was a girl of about six-and-twenty, fair, well shaped, and with a complexion showing the clear skin and brilliant tints which distinguish the women of Valognes, Bayeux, and the district around Alencon. The glances of her blue

eyes did not speak wit, but a resolute temper, mingled with tenderness. She wore a gown of common stuff, and her hair plainly caught up under a cap, in the style of the Pays de Caux, gave her face a touch of charming simplicity.

Nor was her general air, though it lacked the conventional distinction of society, devoid of the dignity natural to a modest young girl who can survey her past life without finding anything to repent in it. At a glance Merle could discover in her a country blossom which, though transplanted to the Parisian hothouses, where so many scorching rays are concentrated, had lost nothing of its bright purity or of its rustic freshness. The young girl's unstudied air, and her modest looks, told him that she did not desire a listener; and he had no sooner retired than the two fair strangers began, in a low voice, a conversation whereof his ear could scarcely catch the bare sound.

"You started in such a hurry," said the country girl, "that you scarcely took time to dress yourself. You are a pretty figure! If we are going farther than Alencon, we really must make a fresh toilet there."

"Oh, oh, Francine!" cried the stranger.

"Yes?"

"That is the third time you have tried to fish out the end and object of our journey."

"Did I say the very least thing to deserve that reproach?"

"Oh! I saw through your little device. Innocent and simple as you used to be, you have learned a few tricks in my school. You have already taken a dislike to direct questioning, and you are right, child; of all known manners of extracting information, it is, to my thinking, the silliest."

"Well, then," went on Francine, "as nothing can escape you, confess, Marie, would not your behavior excite the curiosity of a saint? Yesterday you had not a penny, to-day your pockets are full of gold. They have given you at Mortagne the mail-coach which had been robbed, and its guard killed; you have an escort of Government troops, and you have in your suite a man whom I take to be your evil angel."

"What! Corentin?" said the young stranger, marking her words by a couple of changes of voice, full of contempt—contempt which even extended to the gesture with which she pointed to the rider. "Listen, Francine," she continued; "do you remember Patriot, the monkey whom I taught to imitate Danton, and who amused us so much?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Well; were you afraid of him?"

"He was chained up."

"Well, Corentin is muzzled, child."

"We used," said Francine, "to play with Patriot for hours together, to be sure; but it never ended without his playing us some ugly trick;" and with these words she fell back in the carriage, close to her mistress, took her hands and caressed them coaxingly, saying to her in affectionate tones:

"But you know what I mean, Marie, and you will not answer me. How is it that in twenty-four hours after those fits of sadness which grieved me, oh! so much, you can be madly merry, just as you were when you talked of killing yourself? Whence this change? I have a right to ask you to let me see a little of your heart. It is mine before it is any one's; for never will you be better loved than I love you. Speak, mademoiselle."

"Well, Francine, do you not see the reasons of my gayety all round us? Look at the yellowing tufts of those distant trees; there are not two alike—at a distance one might think them a piece of old tapestry. Look at those hedge-rows, behind which we may meet with Chouans every moment. As I look at these broom bushes I think I can see gun-barrels. I love this constant peril that surrounds us. Wherever the road grows a little gloomy I expect that we shall hear a volley in a moment; and then my heart beats, and a new sensation stirs me. Nor is it either the tremor of fear or the fluttering of pleasure; no! it is something better; it is the working of all that is active in me—it is life. Should I not be merry when I feel my life once more alive?"

"Ah! cruel girl, you will say nothing? Holy Virgin!" cried Francine, lifting her eyes sorrowfully to heaven, "to whom will she confess if she is silent to me?"

"Francine," said the stranger gravely, "I cannot reveal my business to you. It is something terrible this time."

"But why do evil when you know that you are doing it?"

"What would you have? I catch myself thinking as if I were fifty, and acting as if I were fifteen. You have always been my common sense, poor girl! but in this business I must stifle my conscience. And yet," she said, with a sigh, after an interval, "I cannot succeed in doing so. Now, how can you ask me to set over myself a confessor so stern as you are?"

And she patted her hand gently.

"And when did I ever reproach you with what you have done?" cried Francine. "Evil itself is charming in you. Yes; Saint Anne of Auray herself, to whom I pray so hard for you, would give you pardon for all. Besides, have I not followed you on this journey without the least knowledge whither you are going?" and she kissed her mistress's hands affectionately.

"But," said Marie, "you can leave me if your conscience—"

"Come, madame, do not talk like that," said Francine, making a grimace of vexation. "Oh! will you not tell me?"

"I will tell you nothing," said the young lady firmly; "only be assured of this: I hate my enterprise even worse than I hate the man whose gilded tongue expounded it to me. I will be so frank with you as to confess that I would never have submitted to their will if I had not seen in the matter, shameful farce as it is, a mixture of danger and of romance which tempted me. Besides, I did not wish to leave this earth of ours without having tried to gather flowers, of which I have still some hope, were I to perish in the attempt. But remember, as something to redeem my memory, that had I been happy, the sight of their guillotine ready to drop on my head would never have made me take a part in this tragedy—for tragedy as well as farce it is. And now," she continued with a gesture of disgust, "if they changed their minds and counter-ordered the plan, I would throw myself into the Sarthe this moment, and it would not be a suicide; for I have never yet lived."

"Oh! Holy Virgin of Auray! pardon her!"

"What are you afraid of? you know that the dull alternations of domestic life leave my passions cold. That is ill in a woman; but my soul has gained the habit of a higher kind of emotion, able to support stronger trials. I might have been like you, a gentle creature. Why did I rise above or sink below the level of my sex? Ah! what a happy woman is General Bonaparte's wife! I am sure to die young, since I have already come to the point of not blanching at a pleasure party where there is blood to drink, as poor Danton used to say. But forget what I am saying: it is the woman fifty years old in me that spoke. Thank God! the girl of fifteen will soon make her appearance again."

The country maid shuddered. She alone knew the impetuous and ungoverned character of her mistress. She alone was acquainted with the strangenesses of her enthusiastic soul, with the real feelings of the woman who, up to this time, had seen life float before her like an intangible shadow, despite her constant effort to seize and fix it. After lavishing all her resources with no return, she had remained untouched by love. But, stung by a multitude of unfulfilled desires, weary of fighting without a foe, she had come in her despair to prefer good to evil when it offered itself in the guise of enjoyment, evil to good when there was a spice of romance in it, ruin to easy-going mediocrity as the grander of the two, the dark and mysterious prospect of death to a life bereft of hope or even of suffering. Never was such a powder magazine ready for the spark; never so rich a banquet prepared for love to revel in; never a daughter of Eve with more gold mingled throughout her clay. Francine, like an earthly providence, kept a watch over this strange

being, whose perfections she worshiped and whose restoration to the celestial choir from which some sin of pride seemed to have banished her as an expiation, she regarded as the accomplishment of a heavenly mission.

"There is Alençon steeple," said the rider, drawing near the carriage.

"I see it," answered the young lady dryly.

"Very well," quoth he, retiring with signs of obedience not the least absolute for his disappointment.

"Faster! faster!" said the lady to the postilion; "there is nothing to fear now. Trot or gallop if you can; are we not in Alencon streets?"

As she passed the commandant, she cried to him in her sweet voice: "We shall meet at the inn, commandant; come and see me there."

"Just so!" replied the commandant. "At the inn! come and see me! that is the way the creatures talk to a demi-brigadier." And he shook his fist at the carriage which was rolling rapidly along the road.

"Don't complain, commandant," laughed Corentin, who was trying to make his horse gallop so as to catch the carriage up. "She has your general's commission in her sleeve."

"Ah!" growled Hulot to his friend; "I will not let these gentry make an ass of me! I would rather pitch my general's uniform into a ditch than gain it in a woman's chamber. What do these geese mean? do you understand the thing, you fellows?"

"Well, yes," said Merle; "I understand that she is the prettiest woman I ever saw. I think you have mistaken the phrase. Perhaps it is the First Consul's wife?"

"Bah!" answered Hulot. "The First Consul's wife is an old woman, and this is a young one. Besides, my orders from the minister tell me that her name is Mademoiselle de Verneuil. She is a *ci-devant*. As if I did not know it! they all played that game before the Revolution. You could become a demi-brigadier then in two crotchets and six quavers; you only had to say 'My soul!' to them prettily two or three times."

While each soldier stirred his stumps (in the commandant's phrase), the ugly vehicle which acted as mail-coach had quickly gained the hotel of "The Three Moors," situated in the middle of the high street of Alencon. The clatter and rattle of the shapeless carriage brought the host to the door-step. Nobody in Alencon expected the chance of the mail-coach putting up at "The Three Moors;" but the tragedy which had happened at Mortagne made so many people follow it that the two travelers, to evade the general curiosity, slipped into the kitchen, the invariable antechamher of all western inns; and the host was about, after scanning the carriage, to follow them, when the postilion caught him by the arm.

"Attention! Citizen Brutus," said he; "there is an escort of Blues coming. As there is neither driver nor mail-bags, 'tis I who am bringing you the citizenesses. They will pay you, no doubt, like *ci-devant* princesses, and so—"

"And so we will have a glass of wine together in a minute, my boy," said the host.

After glancing at the kitchen, blackened by smoke, and its table stained by uncooked meat, Mademoiselle de Verneuil fled like a bird into the next room, for she liked the kitchen sights and smells as little as the curiosity of a dirty man-cook and a short stout woman who were staring at her.

"What are we to do, wife?" said the innkeeper. "Who the devil would have thought that we should have company like this in these hard times? This lady will get out of patience before I can serve her a decent breakfast. Faith! I have a notion: as they are gentlefolk, I will propose that they should join the person upstairs, eh?"

But when the host looked for his new guest he only found Francine, to whom he said in a low tone, and taking her aside to the back of the kitchen, which looked toward the yard, so as to be out of earshot: "If the ladies would like, as I doubt not, to eat in a private room, I have a deli-

cate meal all ready for a lady and her son. The travelers," added he with an air of mystery, "are not likely to object to share their breakfast with you. They are people of quality."

But he had hardly finished his sentence when he felt a slight tap from a whip-handle on his back, and turning sharply round, he saw behind him a short, strongly-built man who had noiselessly issued from a neighboring room, and whose appearance seemed to strike terror into the plump landlady, the cook, and the scullion. The host himself grew pale as he turned his head round; but the little man shook the hair which completely covered his forehead and eyes, stood on tip-toe to reach the host's ear, and said: "You know what any imprudence or any tale-bearing means? and what is the color of our money when we pay for such things? We don't stint it."

And he added to his words a gesture which made a hideous commentary on them. Although the host's portly person prevented Francine from seeing the speaker, she caught a word or two of the sentences which he had whispered, and remained thunderstruck as she heard the harsh tones of the Breton's voice. While all besides were in consternation, she darted toward the little man; but he, whose movements had the celerity of a wild animal's, was already passing out by a side door into the yard. And Francine thought she must have been mistaken, for she saw nothing but what seemed the black and tan skin of a middle-sized bear. Startled, she ran to the window, and through its smoke-stained glass gazed at the stranger, who was making for the stable with halting steps. Before entering it he sent a glance of his black eyes to the first floor of the inn, and then to the stage-coach, as if he wished to give a hint of importance to some friend about the carriage. In spite of the goatskins, and thanks to this gesture, which revealed his face, Francine was able to recognize by his enormous whip and his gait — crawling, though agile enough at need—the Chouan nicknamed Marche-à-Terre. And she could descry him, though not clearly, across the dark stable, where he lay down in the straw, assuming a posture in which he could survey everything that went on in the inn. Marche-à-Terre had curled himself up in such a way that at a distance—nay, even close at hand—the cleverest spy might have easily taken him for one of the big carter's dogs that sleep coiled round with mouth on paw. His behavior showed Francine that he had not recognized her; and in the ticklish circumstances wherein her mistress was placed, she hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry for it.

But the mysterious relations between the Chouan's threat and the offer of the host—an offer common enough with innkeepers, who like to take toll twice on the same goods — stimulated her curiosity. She left the blurred pane through which she had been looking at the shapeless mass which in the darkness indicated Marche-à-Terre's position, returned toward the innkeeper, and perceived him looking like a man who has put his foot in it, and does not know how to draw it back. The Chouan's gesture had struck the poor man cold. No one in the West was ignorant of the cruel ingenuity of torture with which the King's Huntsmen punished those suspected of mere indiscretion, and the host felt their knives already at his throat. The cook stared with horrified glance at the hearth where they not seldom roasted the feet of those who had given information against them. The plump little landlady held a kitchen knife in one hand, a half-cut apple in the other, and gazed aghast at her husband, while, finally, the scullion tried to make out the meaning of this silent terror, which he did not understand. Francine's curiosity was naturally kindled by this dumb show, where the chief actor, though not present, was in everyone's mind and sight. The girl felt rather pleased at the Chouan's terrible power, and though her simple character did not comport with the usual tricks of a waiting-maid, she had for the moment too great an interest in unraveling the secret not to make the best of her game.

"Well, mademoiselle accepts your offer," she said gravely to the host, who started as if suddenly awakened by the words.

"What offer?" asked he, with real surprise.

"What offer?" asked Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"What offer?" asked a fourth personage, who happened to be on the lowest step of the staircase, and who bounded lightly into the kitchen.

"Why, to breakfast with your people of quality," said Francine impatiently.

"Of quality?" repeated the person who had come from the stairs, in an ironical and satiric tone. "My fine fellow, that seems to me an innkeeper's joke, and a bad one. But if it is this young citizeness that you want to give us as guest, one would be a fool to refuse, my good man," said he, looking at Mademoiselle de Verneuil. And he added, clapping the stupefied host on the shoulder, "In my mother's absence I accept."

The giddy grace of youth hid the insolent pride of these words, which naturally drew the attention of all the actors in the scene to the new arrival. Then the host assumed the air of a Pilate trying to wash his hands of the death of Christ, stepped back two paces toward his plump spouse, and said in her ear, "I call you to witness, that if any harm happens, it is not my fault. But," added he still lower, "to make sure, go and tell Monsieur Marche-à-Terre all about it."

The traveler, a young man of middle height, wore a blue coat and long black gaiters, which rose above his knees, over breeches also of blue cloth. This plain uniform, devoid of epaulets, was that of the students of the École Polytechnique. At a glance Mademoiselle de Verneuil could distinguish under the sober costume an elegant shape and the *je ne sais quoi* which announces native nobility. The young man's face, not striking at first sight, soon became noticeable owing to a certain conformation of feature which showed a soul capable of great things. A brown complexion, fair curly hair, a finely-cut nose, motions full of ease—all, in short, declared in him a course of life guided by lofty sentiments and the habit of command. But the most unmistakable symptoms of his talents were a chin of the Bonaparte type, and a lower lip which joined the upper with such a graceful curve as the acanthus leaf under a Corinthian capital describes. Nature had clothed these two features with an irresistibly winning grace.

"The young man looks, for a Republican, remarkably like a gentleman," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil to herself. To see all this at a glance, to be seized with the desire of pleasing, to bend her head gracefully to one side, smile coquettishly, and dart one of those velvet glances which would rekindle a heart dead to love, to drop over her almond-shaped black eyes deep lids whose lashes, long and bent, made a brown line on her cheek, to devise the most melodious tones with which her voice could infuse a subtle charm into the commonplace phrase, "We are very much obliged to you, sir,"—all this maneuvering did not take her the time which it takes to describe it. Then Mademoiselle de Verneuil, addressing the host, inquired after her room, perceived the staircase, and disappeared up it with Francine, leaving the stranger to settle for himself whether the reply implied acceptance or refusal.

"Who is the woman?" said the student of the École Polytechnique briskly, to the motionless and ever more stupefied host.

"'Tis the citizeness Verneuil," replied Corentin, in a sour tone, scanning the young man jealously, "and she is a *ci-devant*. What do you want with her?"

The stranger, who was humming a Republican song, lifted his head haughtily toward Corentin. The two young men glared at each other for a moment like two gamecocks on the point of fighting; and the glance was the seed of an eternal and mutual hatred. Corentin's green eyes announced spite and treachery as clearly as the soldier's blue ones promised frankness. The one was born to noble manners, the other had nothing but acquired insinuation. The one towered,

the other crouched. The one commanded respect, and the other tried to obtain it. The motto of the one should have been "Gain the day!" of the other, "Share the booty!"

"Is Citizen du Gua Saint-Cyr here?" said a peasant who entered.

"What do you want with him?" said the young man, coming forward.

The peasant bowed low, and handed him a letter, which the cadet threw into the fire after he had read it. By way of answer he nodded, and the man disappeared.

"You come from Paris, no doubt, citizen," said Corentin, coming toward the stranger with a certain easiness of manner, and with an air of suppleness and conciliation which seemed to be more than the Citizen du Gua could bear.

"Yes," he answered dryly.

"And of course you have a commission in the artillery?"

"No, citizen; in the navy."

"Ah!" said Corentin carelessly, "then you are going to Brest?"

But the young sailor turned abruptly on his heel without deigning to answer, and soon disappointed the fond hopes which his face had inspired in Mademoiselle de Verneuil. He busied himself in ordering his breakfast with the levity of a child, cross-examined the host and hostess as to their receipts, wondered at provincial ways like a Parisian just extracted from his enchanted shell, gave himself the airs and megrims of a coquette, and, in short, showed as little strength of character as his face and manners had at first promised much. Corentin smiled with pity when he saw him make faces as he tasted the best cider in Normandy.

"Bah!" cried he; "how can you people drink that stuff? there is food and drink both in it. The Republic may well be shy of a country where they make the vintage with blows of a pole, and shoot travelers from behind a hedge on the high roads. Don't put doctor's stuff like that on the table for us; but give us some good Bordeaux, white and red too. And be sure there is a good fire upstairs. These good folk seem to be quite behind the times in matter of civilization. Ah!" he went on with a sigh, "there is only one Paris in the world, and great pity it is that one can't take it to sea with one. Why, you spoil-sauce!" cried he to the cook, "you are putting vinegar in that fricasseed chicken when you have got lemons at hand. And as for you, Mrs. Landlady, you have given us such coarse sheets that I have not slept a wink all night."

Then he began to play with a large cane, going with childish exactitude through the evolutions which, as they were performed with greater or less finish and skill, indicated the higher or lower rank of a young man in the army of Incroyables.

"And 'tis with dandies like that," said Corentin confidentially to the host, scanning his face as he spoke, "that they hope to pick up the Republic's navy!"

"That fellow," whispered the young man in the hostess's ear, "is a spy of Fouché's. 'Police' is written on his face, and I could swear that the stain on his chin is Paris mud. But two can play—"

As he spoke, a lady toward whom the sailor ran, with every mark of outward respect, entered the inn kitchen. "Dear mamma!" he said, "come here, I pray you. I think I have mustered some guests in your absence."

"Guests!" she answered; "what madness!"

"'Tis Mademoiselle de Verneuil," he replied, in a low voice.

"She perished on the scaffold after the affair at Savenay," said his mother sharply to him; "she had gone to Le Mans to rescue her brother the Prince of Loudon."

"You are mistaken, *madame*," said Corentin, gently, but laying a stress on the word *madame;* "there are two Demoiselles de Verneuil. Great houses always have several branches."

The strange lady, surprised at this familiar address, recoiled a step of two as if to survey this unexpected interlocutor; she fixed on him her black eyes full of that quick shrewdness which comes so naturally to women, and seemed trying to find out with what object he had just testified to the existence of Mademoiselle de Verneuil. At the same time, Corentin,

who had been privately studying the lady, denied her the pleasures of maternity, while granting her those of love. He was too gallant to allow even the happiness of possessing a son twenty years old to a lady whose dazzling skin, whose arched and rich eyebrows, with eyelashes still in good condition, attracted his admiration, while her luxuriant black hair, parted in bands on her forehead, set off the freshness of a face that showed mental power. Some faint wrinkles on the forehead, far from proclaiming age, betrayed the passions of youth, and if the piercing eyes were a little dimmed, the affection might have come either from the fatigues of travel or from a too frequent indulgence in pleasure.

Lastly, Corentin noticed that the stranger was wrapped in a mantle of English stuff, and that the shape of her bonnet, apparently also foreign, did not agree with any of the fashions then called *à la Grecque,* which still ruled Parisian toilets. Now, Corentin was one of those people who are characteristically inclined to the constant suspicion of ill rather than good, and he immediately conceived doubts as to the patriotism of the two travelers. On her side, the lady, who had also and with equal swiftness taken observations of Corentin's person, turned to her son with a meaning look, which could be pretty faithfully worded, "Who is this odd fish? is he on our side?" To which unspoken question the young sailor replied with a look and gesture signifying "Faith! I know nothing at all about him, and I doubt him more than you do." Then, leaving it to his mother to guess the riddle, he turned to the hostess and said in her ear, "Try to find out who this rascal is—whether he is really in the young lady's train, and why."

"So," said Madame du Gua, looking at Corentin, "you are sure, citizen, that there is a Mademoiselle de Verneuil living?"

"She has as certain an existence in flesh and blood, *madame,* as the Citizen du Gua Saint-Cyr."

The answer had a touch of profound irony, which the lady alone understood; and anybody else would have been put out of countenance by it. Her son directed a sudden and steady gaze at Corentin, who pulled out his watch coolly, without appearing to dream of the anxiety which his answer produced. But the lady, disquieted and desirous of knowing at once whether the phrase meant mischief, or whether it was a mere chance utterance, said to Corentin, in the most natural way in the world:

"Good heavens! how unsafe the roads are! We were attacked beyond Mortagne by Chouans, and my son was nearly killed in defending me. He had two balls through his hat!"

"What, madame? you were in the coach which the brigands robbed in spite of the escort, and which has just brought us here? you ought to know the carriage, then. Why, they told me, as I went through Mortagne, that there were two thousand Chouans present at the attack on the coach, and that every soul in it, even the passengers, had perished. This is the way people write history!"

The gossiping tone which Corentin affected, and his simple air, made him look like a frequenter of Little Provence who had learned with sorrow the falsity of some bit of political news.

"Alas! madame," he went on, "if travelers get their throats cut so near Paris, what must be the danger of the roads in Brittany? Faith! I'll go back to Paris myself without venturing further!"

"Is Mademoiselle de Verneuil young and pretty?" asked the lady, struck by a sudden thought and addressing the hostess. But as she spoke the host cut short the conversation, which was almost painfully interesting to the three speakers, by announcing that breakfast was ready. The young sailor offered his hand to his mother with an affectation of familiarity. This confirmed the suspicions of Corentin, to whom he said aloud, as he made for the stair:

"Citizen, if you are in the company of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and if she accepts mine host's proposal, make yourself at home."

Although these words were spoken in a

cavalier fashion, and not very obligingly, Corentin went upstairs.

The young man pressed the lady's hand hard; and when the Parisian was some half-dozen steps behind, he whispered, "See what inglorious risks your rash plans expose us to! if we are found out, how can we escape? and what a part you are making me play!"

The three found themselves in a pretty large room, and it did not need great experience of travel in the West to see that the innkeeper had lavished all his resources, and provided unusual luxuries for the reception of his guests. The table was laid with care, the heat of a large fire had driven out the damp, and the linen, the chairs, and the covers were not intolerably dirty. Therefore Corentin could see that the host had, as the vernacular has it, turned his house inside out to please the strangers.

"That means," said he to himself, "that these people are not what they pretend. This young fellow is a keen hand; I thought he was a fool, but now I take him to be quite a match in sharpness for myself."

The young sailor, his mother, and Corentin waited for Mademoiselle de Verneuil, while the host went to inform her that they were ready; but the fair traveler did not make her appearance. The student of the École Polytechnique, guessing that she might be making objections, left the room humming the song, "Veillons au salut de l'empire," and went toward Mademoiselle de Verneuil's chamber, stimulated by a desire to conquer her scruples, and to bring her with him. Perhaps he wished merely to resolve the suspicions which disturbed him; perhaps to try upon this stranger the fascination which every man prides himself on being able to exert over a pretty woman. "If that is a Republican," thought Corentin, as he saw him leave the room, "may I be hanged! his very shoulders move like a courtier's. And if that is his mother," continued he, looking at Madame du Gua, "I am the pope! I have got hold of some Chouans; let us make sure of what their quality is."

The door soon opened, and the young sailor entered, leading by the hand Mademoiselle de Verneuil, whom he ushered to the table with an air self-satisfied, but full of courtesy. The hour which had passed away had not been time lost in the devil's service. With Francine's assistance, Mademoiselle de Verneuil had arrayed herself for battle in a traveling costume more dangerous perhaps than a ball-dress itself. The simplicity of it had the attractive charm resulting from the art with which a woman, fair enough to dispense with ornaments altogether, knows how to reduce her toilet to the condition of a merely secondary charm. She wore a green dress exquisitely cut, the frogged spencer purposely showing her shape to an extent almost unbecoming in a young girl, and not concealing either her willowy waist, her elegant bust, or the grace of her movements. She entered with the agreeable smile naturally indulged in by women who can show between their rosy lips an even range of teeth as clear as porcelain, and in their cheeks a pair of dimples as fresh as those of a child. As she had laid aside the traveling wrap which had before concealed her almost entirely from the sailor's gaze, she had no difficulty in setting at work the thousand little innocent seeming tricks by which a woman sets off and exhibits for admiration the beauties of her face and the graceful carriage of her head.

Her air and her toilet matched so well, and made her look so much younger, that Madame du Gua thought she might be going too far in giving her twenty years. So coquettish a toilet, one so evidently made with the desire of pleasing, might naturally excite the young man's hopes. But Mademoiselle de Verneuil merely bowed to him with a languid inclination of the head, hardly turning toward him, and seemed to drop his hand in a fashion so easy and careless that it put him completely out of countenance. The strangers could hardly attribute this reserve either to distrust or to coquetry; it seemed rather a natural or an assumed indifference, while the innocent air of the traveler's

face made it impenetrable. Nor did she let any determination toward conquest appear; the pretty, seductive manner which had already deceived the young sailor's self-love seemed a gift of nature. So the stranger took his own chair with something like vexation.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil took Francine by the hand, and addressing Madame du Gua, said in an insinuating voice: "Madame, will you be so good as to permit this maid of mine, whom I look on rather as a friend than as a servant, to eat with us? In these stormy times devoted service can only be repaid by affection. Nay, is it not all that we have left?"

Madame du Gua replied to this last phrase, pronounced in a low voice, with a half-courtesy, rather stiff in manner, and betraying her disappointment at meeting so pretty a woman. Then, leaning toward her son's ear, "Ho!" said she, "'stormy times,' 'devotion,' 'madame,' and 'servant!' She cannot be Mademoiselle de Verneuil; she must be some girl sent by Fouché."

The guests were about to take their places, when Mademoiselle de Verneuil's eyes fell on Corentin. He was still minutely scanning the two strangers, who appeared uncomfortable enough under his gaze.

"Citizen," she said, "I hope you are too well bred to dog my steps in this way. When the Republic sent my family to the scaffold, it was not magnanimous enough to appoint a guardian over me. Although with unheard-of and chivalrous gallantry you have attached yourself to me against my will," and she heaved a sigh, "I am resolved not to allow the cares of guardianship which you lavish on me to be a cause of inconvenience to yourself. I am in safety here; you may leave me as I am."

And she darted at him a steady glance of contempt. Corentin did not fail to understand her. He checked a smile which almost curled the corners of his cunning lips, and bowed to her in the most respectful style.

"Citizeness," said he, "it will always be a happiness to me to obey you. Beauty is the only queen to whose service a true Republican may willingly submit."

As she saw him leave the room, Mademoiselle de Verneuil's eyes gleamed with joy so unaffected, and she directed toward Francine a meaning smile expressing so much satisfaction, that Madame du Gua, though her jealousy had made her watchful, felt inclined to discard the suspicions with which Mademoiselle de Verneuil's extreme beauty had inspired her. "Perhaps she is really Mademoiselle de Verneuil," whispered she to her son.

"And her escort?" replied the young man, whom pique inspired with prudence. "Is she a prisoner or a protégée, a friend or foe of the Government?"

Madame du Gua winked slightly, as though to say that she knew how to discover this secret. But the departure of Corentin seemed to soften the mistrust of the sailor, whose face lost its stern look. He bent on Mademoiselle de Verneuil glances which rather showed an immoderate passion for women in general than the respectful ardor of dawning love. But the young lady only became more circumspect in her demeanor, and reserved her amiability for Madame du Gua. The young man, sulking by himself, endeavored in his vexation to affect indifference in his turn. But Mademoiselle de Verneuil appeared not to notice his behavior, and showed herself ingenuous but not timid, and reserved without prudery. Thus this party of apparent incompatibles showed considerable coolness one to another, producing even a certain awkwardness and constraint, destructive of the pleasure which both Mademoiselle de Verneuil and the young sailor had promised themselves. But women possess such a freemasonry of tact and manners, such close community of nature, and such lively desire for the indulgence of sensibility, that they are always able to break the ice on such occasions. The two fair guests, suddenly and as though by common consent, began gently to rally their solitary cavalier, and to vie with each other in jests and little attentions toward him; their agreement

in so doing putting them on easy terms, so that words and looks which, while the constraint lasted, would have had some special meaning, lost their importance. In short, half an hour had not passed before the two women, already sworn foes at heart, became in appearance the best friends in the world. Yet the young sailor found himself as much vexed by Mademoiselle de Verneuil's ease as he had been by her reserve, and he was so chagrined that, in a fit of silent anger, he regretted having shared his breakfast with her.

"Madame," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil to Madame du Gua, "is your son always as grave as he is now?"

"Mademoiselle," he replied, "I was asking myself what is the good of a fleeting happiness. The secret of my sadness lies in the vividness of my enjoyment."

"Compliments of this sort," said she, laughing, "smack rather of the court than of the École Polytechnique."

"Yet he has but expressed a very natural feeling, mademoiselle," said Madame du Gua, who had her reasons for wishing to keep on terms with the stranger.

"Well, then, laugh a little," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, with a smile, to the young man. "What do you look like when you weep, if what you are pleased to call happiness makes you look so solemn?"

The smile, accompanied as it was by a glance of provocation, which was a little out of keeping with her air of innocence, made the young man pluck up hope. But, urged by that nature which always makes a woman go too far, or not far enough, Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who one moment seemed actually to take possession of the young man by a glance sparkling with all the promises of love, the next met his gallantries with cold and severe modesty—the common device under which women are wont to hide their real feelings. Once, and once only, when each thought the other's eyelids were drooping, they exchanged their real thoughts. But they were as quick to obscure as to communicate this light, which, as it lightened their hearts, also disturbed their composure. As though ashamed of having said so much in a single glance, they dared not look again at each other. Mademoiselle de Verneuil, anxious to alter the stranger's opinion of her, shut herself up in cool politeness, and even seemed impatient for the end of the meal.

"You must have suffered much in prison, mademoiselle?" said Madame du Gua.

"Alas! madame, it does not seem to me that I am out of prison yet."

"Then, is your escort intended to guard or watch you, mademoiselle? Are you an object of affection or of suspicion to the Republic?"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil felt instinctively that Madame du Gua wished her little good, and was put on her guard by the question. "Madame," she answered, "I am really not myself quite sure of the nature of my relations with the Republic at this moment."

"Perhaps you inspire it with terror," said the young man, half ironically.

"We had better respect mademoiselle's secrets," said Madame du Gua.

"Oh! madame, there is not much interest in the secrets of a young girl who as yet knows nothing of life save its misfortunes."

"But," answered Madame du Gua, in order to keep up a conversation which might tell her what she wished to know, "the First Consul seems to be excellently disposed. Do they not say that he is going to suspend the laws against emigrants?"

"Yes, madame," said she, with perhaps too much eagerness; "but, if so, why are Vendée and Brittany being roused to insurrection? Why set France on fire?"

This generous and apparently self-reproachful cry startled the sailor. He gazed scrutinizingly at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, but could not descry any expression of enmity or the reverse on her face. Its delicate covering of bright skin told no tales, and an unconquerable curiosity helped to give a sudden increase to the interest which strong desire had

already made him feel in this strange creature.

"But," she went on, after a pause, "are you going to Mayenne, madame?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," replied the young man with an air as if to say, "What then?"

"Well, madame," continued Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "since your son is in the Republic's service—"

She pronounced these words with an air of outward indifference; but fixing on the two strangers one of those furtive glances of which women and diplomatists have the secret, she continued, "You must be in dread of the Chouans, and an escort is not a thing to be despised. Since we have already become as it were fellow-travelers, come with me to Mayenne."

Mother and son hesitated, and seemed to consult each other.

"It is perhaps imprudent," said the young man, "to confess that business of the greatest importance requires our presence to-night in the neighborhood of Fougères, and that we have not yet found a conveyance; but ladies are so naturally generous that I should be ashamed not to show confidence in you. Nevertheless," he added, "before putting ourselves into your hands we have a right to know whether we are likely to come safe out of them. Are you the mistress or the slave of your Republican escort? Excuse a young sailor's frankness, but I am unable to help seeing something rather singular in your position."

"We live in a time, sir, when nothing that occurs is not singular; so, believe me, you may accept without scruple. Above all," added she, laying stress on her words, "you need fear no treachery in an offer made to you honestly by a person who does not identify herself with political hatreds."

"A journey so made will not lack its dangers," said he, charging his glance with a meaning which gave point to this commonplace reply.

"What more are you afraid of?" asked she, with a mocking smile; "*I* can see no danger for any one."

"Is she who speaks the same woman who just now seemed to share my desires in a look?" said the young man to himself. "What a tone! she must be laying some trap for me."

At the very same moment the clear, piercing hoot of an owl, which seemed to have perched on the chimney-top, quivered through the air like a sinister warning.

"What is that?" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil. "Our journey will not begin with lucky omens. But how do you get owls here that hoot in full day-time?" asked she, with an astonished look.

"It happens sometimes," said the young man, coolly. "Mademoiselle," he continued, "may we not bring you bad luck? was not that your thought? Let us, then, not be fellow-travelers."

He said this with a quiet reticence of manner which surprised Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"Sir," she said, with quite aristocratic insolence, "I have not the least desire to put any constraint on you. Let us keep the very small amount of liberty which the Republic leaves us. If madame was alone, I should insist—"

A soldier's heavy tread sounded in the corridor, and Commandant Hulot soon entered with a sour countenance.

"Ah! colonel, come here!" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, smiling, and pointing to a chair near her. "Let us attend, since things will so have it, to affairs of State. But why don't you laugh? What is the matter with you? Have we Chouans here?"

But the commandant stood agape at the young stranger, whom he considered with extraordinary attention.

"Mother, will you have some more hare? Mademoiselle, you are eating nothing," said the young sailor, busying himself with his guests, to Francine.

But Hulot's surprise and Mademoiselle de Verneuil's attention were so unmistakably serious that willful misunderstanding of them would have been dangerous. So the young man went on abruptly, "What is the matter, commandant? do you happen to know me?"

"Perhaps so," answered the Republican.

"Indeed, I think I have seen you at the school."

"I never went to any school," replied as abruptly the commandant; "and what school do you come from?"

"The École Polytechnique."

"Ah! yes; from the barrack where they try to hatch soldiers in dormitories," answered the commandant, whose hatred for officers who had passed through this scientific seminary was ungovernable. "But what service do you belong to?"

"The navy."

"Ah!" said Hulot, laughing sardonically; "have you heard of many pupils of that school in the navy? It sends out," said he, in a serious tone, "only officers in the artillery and the engineers."

But the young man did not blanch.

"I was made an exception," said he, "because of the name I bear. All our family have been sailors."

"Ah!" said Hulot, "and what is your family name, citizen?"

"Du Gua Saint-Cyr."

"Then, you were not murdered at Mortagne?"

"We had a narrow escape of it," interrupted Madame du Gua eagerly. "My son received two bullets."

"And have you got papers?" said Hulot, paying no attention to the mother.

"Perhaps you want to read them?" asked the young sailor in an impertinent tone. His sarcastic blue eyes were studying by turns the gloomy face of the commandant and Mademoiselle de Verneuil's countenance.

"Pray, does a young monkey like you want to make a fool of me? Your papers at once, or off with you!"

"There! there! my excellent sir, I am not a nincompoop. Need I give you any answer? Who are you?"

"The commandant of the department," replied Hulot.

"Oh, then, my situation may become serious, for I shall have been taken red-handed." And he held out a glass of Bordeaux to the commandant.

"I am not thirsty," answered Hulot. "Come! your papers."

At this moment, hearing the clash of arms and the measured tread of soldiers in the street, Hulot drew near the window with an air of satisfaction which made Mademoiselle de Verneuil shudder. This symptom of interest encouraged the young man, whose face had become cold and proud. Dipping in his coat-pocket, he drew from it a neat pocket-book and offered the commandant some papers, which Hulot read slowly, comparing the description with the appearance of the suspicious traveler. During this examination the owl's hoot began again, but this time it was easy to trace in it the tone and play of a human voice. The commandant gave the young man back his papers with a mocking air.

"That is all very well," said he, "but you must come with me to the district office. I am not fond of music."

"Why do you take him there?" asked Mademoiselle de Verneuil, in an altered tone.

"Young woman," said the commandant, making his favorite grimace, "that is no business of yours."

But Mademoiselle de Verneuil, no less irritated at the soldier's tone than at his words, and most of all at the humiliation to which she was subjected before a man who had taken a fancy to her, started up, and dropped at once the modest, *ingénue* air which she had maintained hitherto. Her face flushed and her eyes sparkled.

"Tell me, has this young man complied with the law's demands?" she continued, not raising her voice, but with a certain quiver in it.

"Yes, in appearance," said Hulot ironically.

"Then, you will be good enough to let him alone *in appearance*," said she. "Are you afraid of his escaping you? You can escort him with me to Mayenne, and he will be in the coach with his lady mother. Not a word: I will have it so. What!" she went on, seeing that Hulot was still indulging in his favorite grimace; "do you still think him a suspect?"

"Well, yes, a little."

"What do you want to do with him?"

"Nothing but cool his head with a little lead. He is a feather-brain," said the commandant, still ironically.

"Are you joking, colonel?" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"Come, my fine fellow," said the commandant, nodding to the sailor, "come along!"

At this impertinence of Hulot's, Mademoiselle de Verneuil recovered her composure, and smiled.

"Do not stir," said she to the young man, with a dignified gesture of protection.

"What a beautiful head!" whispered he to his mother, who bent her brows.

Annoyance and a mixture of irritated but mastered feelings shed indeed fresh beauties over the fair Parisian's countenance. Francine, Madame du Gua, and her son had all risen. Mademoiselle de Verneuil sprang between them and the commandant, who had a smile on his face, and quickly tore open two fastenings of her spencer. Then, with a precipitate action, blinded by the passion of a woman whose self-love has been wounded, and as greedy of the exercise of power as a child is of trying his new toy, she thrust toward Hulot an open letter.

"Read that!" she said to him with a sneer.

And she turned toward the young man, at whom, in the excitement of her victory, she darted a glance where love mingled with malicious triumph. The brows of both cleared, their faces flushed with pleasure, and their souls were filled with a thousand conflicting emotions. By a single look, Madame du Gua on her side showed that, not without reason, she set down this generous conduct of Mademoiselle de Verneuil's much more to love than to charity. The fair traveler at first blushed, and dropped her eyelids modestly, as she divined the meaning of this feminine expression, but in the face of this kind of accusing menace she raised her head again proudly and challenged all eyes. As for the commandant, he read with stupefaction a letter bearing the full ministerial countersign, and commanding all authorities to obey this mysterious person. Then he drew his sword, broke it across his knee, and threw down the fragments.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "no doubt you know what you have to do. But a Republican has his own notions and his own pride. I am not good at obeying where pretty girls command. My resignation shall be sent in to the First Consul to-night, and you will have somebody else than Hulot to do your bidding. Where I cannot understand I stand still; especially when it is my business to understand."

There was a moment's silence, but it was soon broken by the fair Parisian, who stepped up to the commandant, held out her hand, and said:

"Colonel, though your beard is rather long, you may kiss this, for you are a man!"

"I hope so, mademoiselle," said he, depositing clumsily enough a kiss on this remarkable young woman's hand. "As for you, my fine fellow," he added, shaking his finger at the young man, "you have had a nice escape!"

"Commandant," said the stranger, laughing, "it is time the joke should end. I will go to the district office with you if you like."

"And will you bring your invisible whistler, Marche-à-Terre, with you?"

"Who is Marche-à-Terre?" said the sailor, with every mark of unaffected surprise.

"Did not somebody whistle just now?"

"And if they did," said the stranger, "what have I to do with the whistling, if you please? I supposed that the soldiers whom you had ordered up to arrest me, no doubt were letting you know of their arrival."

"You really thought that?"

"Why, yes, egad! But why don't you drink your claret? It is very good."

Surprised at the natural astonishment of the sailor, at the extraordinary levity of his manner, at the youth of his face, which was made almost childish by his carefully curled fair hair, the commandant hovered between different suspicions.

Then his glance fell on Madame du Gua, who was trying to interpret the exchange of looks between her son and Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and he asked her abruptly:

"Your age, citizeness?"

"Ah, sir officer! the laws of our Republic are becoming very merciless. I am thirty-eight."

"May I be shot if I believe a word of it! Marche-à-Terre is here—he whistled—and you are Chouans in disguise! God's thunder! I will have the whole inn surrounded and searched!"

At that very moment a whistle, of a broken kind, but sufficiently like that which had been heard, rose from the inn yard, and interrupted the commandant. He rushed into the corridor—luckily enough, for it prevented him from seeing the pallor which his words had caused on Madame du Gua's cheek. But he found the whistler to be a postilion who was putting the coach-horses to; and laying aside his suspicions, so absurd did it seem to him that Chouans should risk themselves in the very center of Alencon, he came back crestfallen.

"I forgive him, but he shall dearly pay later the time he has made us pass here," whispered the mother in her son's ear, as Hulot entered the room.

The excellent officer's embarrassed countenance showed the struggle which his stern sense of duty was carrying on with his natural kindness. He still looked sulky; perhaps because he thought he had made a blunder; but he took the glass of claret, and said:

"Comrade, excuse me, but your school sends the army such boys for officers."

"Then, have the brigands officers more boyish still?" laughingly asked the sailor, as he called himself.

"For whom did you take my son?" asked Madame du Gua.

"For the Gars, the chief sent to the Chouans and the Vendéans by the London Cabinet—the man whom they call the Marquis de Montauran."

The commandant still scrutinized attentively the faces of these two suspicious persons, who gazed at each other with the peculiar looks which are natural to the self-satisfied and ignorant, and which may be interpreted by this dialogue: "Do you know what he means?" "No, do you?" "Don't know anything about it." "Then, what *does* he mean? He's dreaming!" And then follows the sly, jeering laugh of a fool who thinks himself triumphant.

The sudden alteration in manner of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who seemed struck dumb at hearing the name of the Royalist general, was lost on all except Francine, who alone knew the scarcely distinguishable changes of her young mistress's face. The commandant, completely driven from his position, picked up the pieces of his sword, stared at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, whose ebullition of feeling had found the weak place in his heart, and said to her:

"As for you, mademoiselle, I do not unsay what I have said. And to-morrow these fragments of my sword shall find their way to Bonaparte, unless—"

"And what do I care for Bonaparte, and your Republic, and the Chouans, and the king, and the Gars?" cried she, hardly checking a display of temper which was in doubtful taste.

Either actual passion or some unknown caprice sent flashes of color through her face, and it was easy to see that the girl would care nothing for the whole world as soon as she had fixed her affections on a single human being. But with equal suddenness she forced herself to be once more calm, when she saw that the whole audience had bent their looks on her as on some consummate actor. The commandant abruptly left the room, but Mademoiselle de Verneuil followed him, stopped him in the passage, and asked him in a grave tone:

"Have you, then, really strong reasons for suspecting this young man of being the Gars?"

"God's thunder! mademoiselle, the fellow who travels with you came to warn me that the passengers in the mail had been assassinated by the Chouans, which I knew before. But what I did not know was the name of the dead travelers. It was Du Gua Saint-Cyr."

"Oh! if Corentin is at the bottom of it," said she, with a contemptuous gesture, "I am surprised at nothing."

The commandant retired without daring to look at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, whose perilous beauty already made his heart beat. "Had I waited a minute longer," he said to himself as he went downstairs, "I should have been fool enough to pick up my sword in order to escort her."

When she saw the young man's eyes riveted on the door by which Mademoiselle de Verneuil had left the room, Madame du Gua whispered to him, "What! always the same? Women will certainly be your ruin. A doll like that makes you forget everything! Why did you allow her to breakfast with us? What sort of a person is a daughter of the house of Verneuil who accepts invitations from strangers, is escorted by Blues, and disarms them with a letter which she carries like a billet-doux in her bosom? She is one of the loose women by whose aid Fouché hopes to seize you, and the letter she showed was given to her in order to command the services of the Blues against yourself!"

"But, madame," said the young man, in a tone so sharp that it cut the lady to the heart and blanched her cheeks, "her generosity gives the lie to your theory. Pray remember that we are associated by nothing save the king's business. After you have had Charette at your feet, is there another man in the world for you? Have you another purpose in life than to avenge him?"

The lady stood whelmed in thought like a man who from the beach sees the shipwreck of his fortune and covets it only the more ardently. But as Mademoiselle de Verneuil re-entered, the young sailor exchanged with her a smile and a glance instinct with gentle raillery. Doubtful as the future might be, short-lived as might be their intimacy, hope told none the less her flattering tale. Swift as it was, the glance could not escape the shrewdness of Madame du Gua, who understood it well. Her brow clouded lightly but immediately, and her face could not hide her jealous thoughts. Francine kept her gaze on this lady; she saw her eyes flash, her cheeks flush; she thought she could discern the countenance of one inspired by some hellish fancy, mastered by some terrible revulsion of thought. But lightning is not swifter, nor death more sudden, than was the flight of this expression; and Madame du Gua recovered her cheerfulness of look with such self-command that Francine thought she must have been under a delusion. Nevertheless, recognizing in the woman a masterfulness of spirit at least equal to that of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, she shuddered as she foresaw the terrible conflicts likely to occur between two minds of the same temper, and trembled as she saw Mademoiselle de Verneuil advance toward the young officer, casting on him a passionate and intoxicating glance, drawing him toward herself with both hands, and turning his face to the light with a gesture half coquettish and half malicious.

"Now tell me the truth," said she, trying to read it in his eyes. "You are not the Citizen Du Gua Saint-Cyr?"

"Yes, I am, mademoiselle."

"But his mother and he were killed the day before yesterday!"

"I am extremely sorry," said he, laughing; "but however that is, I am all the same your debtor in a fashion for which I shall ever be most grateful to you, and I only wish I were in a position to prove my gratitude."

"I thought I had saved an emigrant; but I like you better as a Republican."

Yet, no sooner had these words, as if by thoughtlessness, escaped her lips, than she became confused; she blushed to her very eyes, and her whole bearing showed a deliciously naive emotion. She dropped the officer's hands as if reluctantly, and urged, not by any shame at having clasped them, but by some impulse which was too much for her heart, she left him intoxicated with hope. Then she seemed suddenly to reproach herself with this freedom, authorized though it might seem to be by their passing adventures of travel, resumed a conventional behavior, bowed

to her two fellow-travelers, and, disappearing with Francine, sought their apartment. As they reached it, Francine entwined her fingers, turned the palms of her hands upward with a twist of the arms, and said, gazing at her mistress:

"Ah! Marie, how much has happened in a little time! Who but you would have adventures of this kind?"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil threw herself with a bound on Francine's neck. "Ah!" said she, "this is life! I am in heaven!"

"In hell, it may be," said Francine.

"Oh! hell if you like," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil merrily. "Here, give me your hand. Feel my heart, how it beats. I am in a fever. I care nothing for the whole world. How often have I seen that man in my dreams! What a beautiful head he has! what a flashing eye!"

"Will he love you?" asked the simple, straightforward peasant girl, in a lowered tone, her face dashed with sadness.

"Can you ask such a question?" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil. "But tell me, Francine," she added, assuming an air half serious and half comic, "is he so *very* hard to please?"

"Yes, but will he love you always?" replied Francine, with a smile.

Both girls looked at each other for a time surprised, Francine at showing so much knowledge of life, Marie at perceiving for the first time a promise of happiness in an amorous adventure. So she remained silent, like one who leans over a precipice, the depth of which he would gauge by waiting for the thud of a pebble that he has cast in carelessly enough at first.

"Ah! that is my business," said she, with the gesture of a gambler who plays his last stake. "I have no pity for a forsaken woman; she has only herself to blame if she is deserted. I have no fear of keeping, dead or alive, the man whose heart has once belonged to me. But," she added after a moment's silence, and in a tone of surprise, "how do you come to be so knowing as this, Francine?"

"Mademoiselle," said the young girl eagerly, "I hear steps in the passage."

"Ah," said she, listening, "it is not *he;* but," she continued, "that is your answer, is it? I understand. I will wait for your secret, or guess it."

Francine was right. The conversation was interrupted by three taps at the door; and Captain Merle, on hearing the "Come in!" which Mademoiselle de Verneuil addressed to him, quickly entered. The captain made a soldierly bow to the lady, venturing to throw a glance at her at the same time, and was so dazzled by her beauty that he could find nothing to say to her but "Mademoiselle, I am at your orders."

"Have you become my guardian in virtue of the resignation of the chief of your demi-brigade? that is what they call your regiment, is it not?"

"My superior officer is Adjutant-Major Gérard, by whose orders I come."

"Is your commandant, then, so much afraid of me?" asked she.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle. Hulot fears nothing; but you see, ladies are not exactly in his way, and it vexed him to find his general wearing a kerchief."

"Yet," retorted Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "it was his duty to obey his chiefs. I like obedience, I warn you, and I will not have people resist me."

"That would be difficult," answered Merle.

"Let us take counsel together," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil. "You have some fresh men here. They shall escort me to Mayenne, which I can reach this evening. Can we find other troops there so as to go on without stopping? The Chouans know nothing of our little expedition; and by traveling thus at night we shall have very bad luck indeed if we find them in numbers strong enough to attack us. Come, tell me, do you think this feasible?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"What sort of a road is it from Mayenne to Fougères?"

"A rough one; the going is all up and down—a regular squirrel's country."

"Let us be off, then," said she; "and

as there is no danger in going out of Alencon, you set out first. We shall easily catch you up."

"One would think she was an officer of ten years' standing," said Merle to himself, as he went out. "Hulot is wrong. The girl is not one of those who draw their rents from down feathers. Odds cartridges! If Captain Merle wishes to become an adjutant-major, he had better not mistake Saint Michael for the devil."

While Mademoiselle de Verneuil was conferring with the captain, Francine had left the room, intending to examine through a passage window a certain spot in the courtyard, whither, from the moment she had entered the inn, an irresistible curiosity had attracted her. She gazed at the straw in the stable with such profound attention that you might have thought her deep in prayer before a statue of the Virgin. Very soon she perceived Madame du Gua making her way toward Marche-à-Terre as carefully as a cat afraid of wetting her paws. The Chouan no sooner saw the lady than he rose and observed toward her an attitude of the deepest respect—a singular circumstance, which roused Francine's curiosity still more. She darted into the yard, stole along the wall so as not to be seen by Madame du Gua, and tried to hide herself behind the stable door. By stepping on tip-toe, holding her breath, and avoiding the slightest noise, she succeeded in posting herself close to Marche-à-Terre without exciting his attention. "And if," said the strange lady to the Chouan, "after all these inquiries, you find that it is not her name, shoot her without mercy, as you would a mad dog."

"I understand," answered Marche-à-Terre.

The lady retired, and the Chouan, replacing his red woolen cap on his head, remained standing, and was scratching his ear after the fashion of puzzled men, when he saw Francine stand before him, as if by enchantment.

"Saint Anne of Auray!" cried he, suddenly dropping his whip, folding his hands, and remaining in a state of ecstasy. His coarse face was tinged with a slight flush, and his eyes flashed like diamonds lost in the mud.

"Is it really Cottin's wench?" he said, in a low voice, that none but himself could hear. "Ah, but you are brave!" (*godaine*), said he, after a pause. This odd word, *godain*, or *godaine*, is part of the patois of the district, and supplies lovers with a superlative to express the conjunction of beauty and finery.

"I should be afraid to touch you," added Marche-à-Terre, who nevertheless advanced his broad hand toward Francine, as if to make sure of the weight of a thick gold chain which surrounded her neck and fell down to her waist.

"You had better not, Pierre," answered Francine, inspired by the feminine instinct which makes a woman tyrannize whenever she is not tyrannized over.

She stepped haughtily back, after enjoying the Chouan's surprise. But she made up for the harshness of her words by a look full of kindness, and drew near to him again.

"Pierre," said she, "that lady was talking to you* of my young mistress, was she not?"

Marche-à-Terre stood dumb, with a struggle going on his face like that at dawn between light and darkness. He gazed by turns at Francine, at the great whip which he had let fall, and at the gold chain which seemed to exercise over him a fascination not less than that of the Breton girl's face. Then, as if to put an end to his own disquiet, he picked up his whip, but said no word.

"Oh!" said Francine, who knew his inviolable fidelity, and wished to dispel his suspicions, "it is not hard to guess that this lady bade you kill my mistress."

Marche-à-Terre dropped his head in a significant manner, which was answer enough for "Cottin's wench."

"Well, Pierre, if the least harm hap-

* Marche-à-Terre, in his awe at Francine's finery, and she, in her desire to play the lady, have used *vous*, which the original italicizes. Both adopt the familiar *tu* henceforth. But the second person singular is so awkward in ordinary English, that it seems better adjusted, with this warning, to the common use.

pens to her, if a hair of her head is injured, we have looked our last at one another here for time and for eternity! I shall be in Paradise then, and you in hell!"

No demoniac just about to undergo exorcism in form by the church was ever more agitated than Marche-à-Terre by this prediction, pronounced with a confidence which gave it a sort of certainty. The expression of his eyes, charged at first with a savage tenderness, then struck by a fanatical sense of duty as imperious as love itself, turned to ferocity, as he perceived the masterful air of the innocent girl who had once been his love. But Francine interpreted the Chouan's silence in her own fashion.

"You will do nothing for me, then?" she said, in a reproachful tone.

At these words the Chouan cast on his mistress a glance as black as a raven's wing.

"Are you your own mistress?" growled he in a tone that Francine alone could understand.

"Should I be where I am?" said she indignantly. "But what are *you* doing here? You are still *Chouanning,* you are prowling along the highways like a mad animal trying to bite. Oh, Pierre! if you were sensible you would come with me. This pretty young lady (who, I should tell you, was brought up at our house at home), has taken care of me. I have two hundred good livres a year. Mademoiselle has bought me Uncle Thomas's great house for five hundred crowns, and I have two thousand livres saved from my wages."

But her smile and the list of her riches made no impression on Marche-à-Terre's stolid air. "The rectors have given the word for war," said he; "every Blue we lay low is good for an indulgence."

"But perhaps the Blues will kill you!"

His only answer was to let his arms drop by his sides, as if to apologize for the smallness of his offering to God and the king.

"And what would become of me?" asked the young girl sorrowfully.

Marche-à-Terre gazed at Francine as if stupefied; his eyes grew in size, and there dropped from them two tears, which trickled in parallel lines down his hairy cheeks on to his goatskin raiment, while a dull groan came from his breast.

"Saint Anne of Auray! Pierre, is this all you have to say to me after seven years' parting? How you have changed!"

"I love you still, and always!" answered the Chouan roughly.

"No," she whispered, "the king comes before me."

"If you look at me like that," he said, "I must go."

"Good-by! then," she said sadly.

"Good-by!" repeated Marche-à-Terre. He seized Francine's hand, squeezed it, kissed it, crossed himself, and plunged into the stable like a dog that has just stolen a bone.

"Pille-Miche," said he to his comrade, "I cannot see my way. Have you got your snuff-mull?"

"Oh! *cré bleu!* . . . what a fine chain!" answered Pille-Miche, groping in a pocket under his goatskin. Then he held out to Marche-à-Terre one of the little conical horn boxes in which Bretons put the finely powdered tobacco which they grind for themselves during the long winter evenings. The Chouan raised his thumb so as to make in his left hand the hollow wherein old soldiers measure their pinches of snuff, and shook the mull (whose tip Pille-Miche had screwed off) hard. An impalpable powder fell slowly through the little hole at the point of this Breton implement. Marche-à-Terre repeated the operation, without speaking, seven or eight times, as if the powder possessed the gift of changing his thoughts. All of a sudden he let a gesture of despair escape him, threw the mull to Pille-Miche, and picked up a rifle hidden in the straw.

"It is no good taking seven or eight pinches like that right off," said the miserly Pille-Miche.

"Forward!" cried Marche-à-Terre hoarsely. "There is work to do." And some thirty Chouans who were sleeping under the mangers and in the straw lifted their heads, saw Marche-à-Terre stand-

ing, and promptly disappeared by a door opening on to gardens, whence the fields could be reached.

When Francine left the stable, she found the coach ready to start. Mademoiselle de Verneuil and her two fellow-travelers had already got in, and the Breton girl shuddered as she saw her mistress facing the horses, by the side of the woman who had just given orders for her death. The "suspect" placed himself opposite to Marie; and as soon as Francine had taken her place, the heavy vehicle set off at a smart trot.

The sun had already dispelled the gray mists of an autumn morning, and its rays gave to the melancholy fields a certain lively air of holiday youth. It is the wont of lovers to take these atmospheric changes as omens; but the silence which for some time prevailed among the travelers struck Francine as singular. Mademoiselle de Verneuil had recovered her air of indifference, and sat with lowered eyes, her head slightly leaning to one side, and her hands hidden in a kind of mantle which she had put on. If she raised her eyes at all it was to view the landscape which, shifting rapidly, flitted past them. Entertaining no doubt of admiration, she seemed willfully to refuse opportunity for it; but her apparent nonchalance indicated coquetry rather than innocence. The touching purity which gives so sweet an accord to the varying expressions in which tender and weak souls reveal themselves, seemed powerless to lend its charm to a being whose strong feelings destined her as the prey of stormy passion. Full, on his side, of the joy which the beginning of a flirtation gives, the stranger did not as yet trouble himself with endeavoring to harmonize the discord that existed between the coquetry and the sincere enthusiasm of this strange girl. It was enough for him that her feigned innocence permitted him to gaze at will on a face as beautiful in its calm as it had just been in its agitation. We are not prone to quarrel with that which gives us delight. It is not easy for a pretty woman in a carriage to withdraw from the gaze of her companions, whose eyes are fixed on her as if seeking an additional pastime to beguile the tedium of travel. Therefore, congratulating himself on being able to satisfy the hunger of his rising passion without its being possible for the strange lady either to avoid his eyes or be offended at their persistence, the young officer studied to his heart's content, and as if he had been examining a picture, the pure and dazzling lines of her face.

Now the day brought out the pink transparence of the nostrils and the double curve which formed a junction between the nose and the upper lip. Now a paler sunbeam played on the tints of the complexion—pearly-white under the eyes and round the mouth, roseate on the cheeks, creamy toward the temples and on the neck. He admired the contrasts of light and shade produced by the hair which surrounded the face with its raven tresses, giving it a fresh and passing grace; for with woman everything is fugitive. Her beauty of to-day is often not that of yesterday, and it is lucky for her, perhaps, that it is so. Thus the self-styled sailor, still in that age when man enjoys the nothings that make up the whole of love, watched delightedly the successive movements of the eyelids and the ravishing play which each breath gave to the bosom. Sometimes, his will and his thoughts in unison, he spied a harmony between the expression of the eyes and the faint movements of the lips. Each gesture showed him a new soul, each movement a new facet in this young girl. If a thought disturbed her mobile features, if a sudden flush passed over them, if they were illumined by a smile, his delight in endeavoring to guess the mysterious lady's secrets was infinite. The whole of her was a trap for soul and sense at once, and their silence, far from raising a barrier between the exchange of their hearts, gave their thoughts common ground. More than one glance in which her eyes met the stranger's told Marie de Verneuil that this silence might become compromising; and she accordingly put to Madame du Gua some of the trivial questions which

start a conversation, though she could not keep the son out of her talk with the mother.

"How, madame," said she, "could you make up your mind to send your son into the navy? is not this a sentence of perpetual anxiety on yourself?"

"Mademoiselle, it is the lot of women—I mean of mothers—to tremble always for their dearest treasures."

"Your son is very like you!"

"Do you think so, mademoiselle?"

This unconscious indorsement of the age which Madame du Gua had assigned to herself, made the young man smile, and inspired his so-called mother with fresh annoyance. Her hatred grew at every fresh glance of love which her son threw at Marie. Whether they spoke or were silent, everything kindled in her a hideous rage, disguised under the most insinuating manners,

"Mademoiselle," said the stranger, "you are wrong. Sailors are not more exposed to danger than other warriors. Indeed, there is no reason for women to hate the navy; for have we not over the land services the immense advantage of remaining faithful to our sweethearts?"

"Yes, because you cannot help it," replied Mademoiselle de Verneuil, laughing.

"It is a kind of faithfulness, all the same," said Madame du Gua in a tone which was almost somber.

But the conversation became livelier, and occupied itself with subjects of no interest to any but the three travelers, for in such a situation persons of intelligence are able to give a fresh meaning to mere commonplaces. But the talk, frivolous as it seemed, which these strangers chose to interchange, hid the desires, the passions, the hopes which animated them. Marie's constantly wide-awake subtlety and her aggressive wit taught Madame du Gua that only slander and false dealing could give her advantage over a rival as redoubtable in intellect as in beauty. But the travelers now caught up their escort, and their vehicle began to move less rapidly. The young sailor saw in front a long stretch of ascent, and suggested to Mademoiselle de Verneuil that she should get out and walk. His good manners and attentive politeness apparently had their effect on the fair Parisian, and he felt her consent as a compliment.

"Is madame of our mind?" asked she of Madame du Gua. "Will she join our walk?"

"Coquette!" said the lady as she alighted.

Marie and the stranger walked together, but with an interval between them. The sailor, already a prey to tyrannous desire, was eager to dispel the reserve which she showed toward him, and the nature of which he did not fail to see. He thought to do so by jesting with the fair stranger under cover of that old French gayety—that spirit, now frivolous, now grave, but always chivalrous though often mocking—which was the note of the more distinguished men among the exile aristocracy. But the lively Parisian girl rallied the young Republican so maliciously, and contrived to insinuate such a contemptuous expression of reproach for his attempts at frivolity, while showing a marked preference for the bold and enthusiastic ideas which in spite of himself shone through his discourse, that he could not miss the way to win her. The talk therefore changed its character, and the stranger soon showed that the hopes inspired by his expressive countenance were not delusive. Each moment he found new difficulties in comprehending the siren, with whom he fell more and more in love, and was obliged to suspend his judgment in reference to a girl who seemed to amuse herself by contradicting each opinion that he formed of her. Enticed at first by the contemplation of her physical beauty, he felt himself now attracted toward her unknown mind by a curiosity which Marie took pleasure in kindling.

The conversation little by little assumed a character of intimacy very foreign to the air of indifference which Mademoiselle de Verneuil tried unsuccessfully to infuse into it. Although Madame du Gua had followed the lovers, they had unconsciously walked quicker than she did, and were soon some hundred paces ahead. The handsome couple trod the fine gravel

of the road, delighted like children in keeping step as their paces sounded lightly, happy in the rays of light which wrapped them as in spring sunshine, and in breathing together the autumnal perfume, so rich in vegetable spoils that it seemed a food brought by the winds to nourish the melancholy of young love.* Although both agreed in seeming to see nothing but an ordinary chance in their momentary connection, the heavens, the scene, and the season gave their emotion a touch of seriousness which had the air of passion. They began to praise the beauty of the day; then they talked of their strange meeting, of the approaching breach of so pleasant an acquaintance, of the ease with which one becomes intimate while traveling with people who are lost to sight almost as soon as seen. After this remark the young man availed himself of the unspoken leave which seemed to be granted him to edge in some tender confidences, and endeavored to risk a declaration in the style of a man accustomed to the situation.

"Have you noticed, mademoiselle," said he, "how little feeling cares to keep in the beaten track during these terrible times of ours? Are not all our circumstances full of surprise and of the inexplicable? We men of to-day love, we hate, on the strength of a single glance. At one moment we are united for life, at another we part with the swiftness of those who march to death. We are always in a hurry, like the nation itself in its tumults. In the midst of danger men join hands more quickly than in the jog-trot of ordinary life, and in these latter days at Paris all have known, as if on a battle-field, what a single hand-clasp can tell."

"Men felt the need of living hard and fast," she answered, "because there was but a short time to live." And then, glancing at her young companion in a way which seemed to foretell the end of their brief journey, she said, a little maliciously: "For a young man who is just leaving the school, you are well up in the affairs of life."

"What do you really think of me?" said he, after a moment's silence. "Tell me your opinion without sparing."

"I suppose you wish to purchase the right of giving me yours of me?" she replied, laughing.

"That is no answer," said he, after a brief pause. "Take care! silence itself is often a reply."

"But have I not guessed everything you meant to say to me? You have said too much as it is."

"Oh! if we understand each other," said he, with a laugh, "you have given me more than I dared hope."

She smiled so graciously that it seemed as if she accepted the courteous challenge with which all men love to threaten a woman. So they took it for granted, half seriously, half in jest, that they never could be to each other anything else than that which they were at the moment. The young man might abandon himself, if he liked, to a hopeless passion, and Marie might mock it. So, having thus erected between them an imaginary barrier, they appeared both eager to profit by the rash license for which they had bargained. Suddenly Marie struck her foot against a stone, and stumbled.

"Take my arm," said the stranger.

"I must needs do so, you giddy-pate," said she. "You would be too proud if I refused; I should seem to be afraid of you."

"Ah! mademoiselle," answered he, pressing her arm that she might feel the beating of his heart, "you will make me proud of this favor."

"Well, the ease with which I consent will dispel your illusions."

"Would you protect me already against the danger of the feelings which you yourself inspire?"

"Pray leave off trying to entangle me," said she, "in these little boudoir fancies, these word-puzzles of my lady's chamber. I do not like to see in a man of your character the kind of wit that fools can have. See! we are under a lovely sky, in the

* This, I fear, is what Balzac's own countrymen would call *galimatias*. But it is what Balzac wrote.

open country; before us, above us, all is grand. You mean to tell me that I am beautiful, do you not? Your eyes have told me that already, and besides, I know it. Nor am I a woman who is flattered by compliments. Would you perchance talk to me of your *feelings?*" she said, with an ironic stress on the word. "Do you think me silly enough to believe in a sudden sympathy strong enough to throw over a whole life the masterful memory of a single morning?"

"Not of a morning," answered he, "but of a beautiful woman who has shown herself a generous one as well."

"You forget," she rejoined, with a laugh, "attractions greater than these. I am a stranger to you, and my name, my quality, my position, my self-possession in mind and manners—all must seem extraordinary to you."

"You are no stranger to me," cried he; "I have divined you already, and I would have nothing added to your perfections, except a little more faith in the love which you inspire at first sight!"

"Ah! my poor boy of seventeen, you talk of *love* already?" said she, smiling. "Well, so be it. . . . 'Tis a topic of conversation between man and woman, like the weather at a morning call. So let us take it. You will find in me no false modesty and no littleness of mind. I can listen to the word 'love' without blushing. It has been said to me so often, with no heart-accent in it, that it has become almost meaningless. I have heard it in theaters, in books, in society, everywhere. But I have never met anything which corresponded in fact to the magnificent sentiments which it implies."

"Have you tried to find it?"

"Yes."

The word was said with such unreserve that the young man started and stared at Marie as if he had changed his mind suddenly as to her character and station.

"Mademoiselle," said he, with ill-concealed emotion, "are you a girl or a woman, an angel or a fiend?"

"I am both," replied she, laughing. "Is there not always something angelic and something diabolic as well in a young girl who has never loved, who does not love, and who perhaps will never love?"

"And yet you are happy?" said he, with a greater freedom of tone and manner, as if he already thought less respectfully of her who had delivered him.

"Oh!" she said. "Happy? . No! When I meditate by myself, and feel myself mastered by the social conventions which make me artificial, I envy the privileges of men. But when I reflect on all the means which Nature has given us to surround you, to wrap you in the meshes of an invisible power which none of you can resist, then my part in this comedy here below looks more promising to me. And then, again, it seems to me wretched, and I feel that I should despise a man if he were the dupe of ordinary allurements. To be brief, at one time I see the yoke we bear, and it pleases me, then it seems horrible, and I revolt. At another I feel that aspiration of self-sacrifice which makes woman so fair and noble a thing, only to experience afterward a devouring desire of power. Perhaps it is but the natural fight of the good and evil principle which makes up the life of all creatures that on earth do dwell. Both angel and fiend—you have said it! It is not to-day that I came to know my double nature. Yet we women know our weakness better than you do. Do we not possess an instinct which makes us look in everything toward a perfection too certainly impossible of attainment? But," she added, with a sigh, and a glance toward heaven, "what ennobles us in our own eyes—"

"Is what?" said he.

"Why," said she, "that we all of us, more or less, maintain the struggle against our fated incompleteness."

"Mademoiselle, why should we part to-night?"

"Ah!" she said, with a smile at the fiery glance which the young man darted on her, "we had better get into the carriage; the open air is not good for us."

Marie turned sharply on her heel, and the stranger followed, pressing her arm with a vigor which was hardly respectful, but which expressed at once adoration and

tyrannous desire. She quickened her steps; the sailor perceived that she wished to avoid a perhaps inopportune declaration, but this only increased his fervor, and setting all to the touch in order to gain a first favor from the girl, he said to her with an arch look:

"Shall I tell you a secret?"

"Tell it at once, if it concerns yourself."

"I am not in the service of the Republic. Whither are you going? I will go too."

As he spoke, Marie trembled violently, drew her arm from his, and covered her face with both hands to veil, it might be a flush, it might be a pallor, which changed her appearance. But she uncovered it almost immediately, and said in a tender tone: "You have begun, then, as you would have finished, by deceiving me?"

"Yes," he said.

At this answer she turned her back on the bulky vehicle toward which they were advancing, and began almost to run in the opposite direction.

"But," said the stranger, "just now the air did not agree with you!"

"Oh! it has changed," said she gravely, and still walking on, a prey to stormy thoughts.

"You are silent?" asked the stranger, whose heart was full of the sweet flutter of apprehension which the expectation of pleasure brings with it.

"Oh!" she said shortly, "the tragedy has been prompt enough in beginning."

"What tragedy do you mean?" asked he. She stopped and scanned the cadet from head to foot, with an expression compact of fear and interest both; then she hid the feelings which agitated her under an air of profound calm, showing that, for a young girl, she had no small experience of life.

"Who are you?" she said. "But I know—when I saw you, I suspected it: you are the Royalist chief they call the Gars. The ex-bishop of Autun is right in telling us always to believe in presentiments of evil."

"What concern have you in knowing that person?"

"What concern could he have in hiding himself from me, who have already saved his life?"

She spoke with a forced laugh, and went on: "It was prudent of me to hinder your declaration of love. Know, sir, that I hate you! I am a Republican, you a Royalist; and I would give you up if my word were not pledged to you, if I had not already saved you once, and if—"

She stopped. This violent flux and reflux of thought, this struggle which she cared no longer to hide, gave the stranger some uneasiness, and he tried, but in vain, to sound her intention.

"Let us part at once; I will have it so. Good-by!" she said, and turning abruptly she made a step or two; but then came back.

"No!" she continued, "my interest in learning who you are is too great. Hide nothing from me and tell me the truth. Who are you? For are you just as much a cadet of the school as you are a boy of seventeen—"

"I am a sailor, ready to quit the sea, and follow you whithersoever your fancy guides me. If I am fortunate enough to excite your curiosity by anything mysterious about me, I shall take good care not to put an end to it. What is the good of mixing up the serious concerns of every-day life with the life of the heart in which we were beginning to understand each other so well?"

"Our souls *might* have understood each other," she said gravely. "But, sir, I have no right to claim your confidence. You will never know the extent of your obligations to me; and I shall hold my peace."

They walked some distance without uttering a word.

"You seem to take a great interest in my life," said the stranger.

"Sir," she said, "I beg you tell me your real name, or say nothing! You are childish," she added, with a shrug of her shoulders, "and I am sorry for you."

The fair traveler's persistency in trying to divine his secret made the self-styled sailor hesitate between prudence and his desires. The vexation of a woman whom we covet is a powerful attraction: her

very submission is as conquering as her anger; it attacks so many chords in a man's heart that it penetrates and subjugates the heart itself. Was Mademoiselle de Verneuil merely trying a fresh trick of coquetry? In spite of his passion, the stranger had self-command enough to be mistrustful of a woman who was so desperately set on tearing from him a secret of life and death.

"Why," he said, taking her hand, which she had let him take in absence of mind, "why has my indiscretion, which seemed to give a future to this day, destroyed its charm instead?" But Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who seemed in distress, was silent. "How have I hurt you?" he went on, "and how can I soothe you?"

"Tell me your name."

Then the two walked in silence, and they made some progress thus. Suddenly Mademoiselle de Verneuil halted, like a person who has made up her mind on a point of importance:

"Marquis of Montauran," said she with dignity, and yet not quite successfully disguising an agitation that made her features quiver nervously, "whatever it may cost me, I am happy to be able to do you a service. We must part here. The escort and the coach are too necessary to your safety for you to refuse either one or the other. Fear nothing from the Republicans: all these soldiers, look you, are men of honor, and the adjutant will faithfully execute the orders which I am about to give him. For my part, I can easily regain Alencon with my maid; some soldiers will accompany us. Heed me well, for your life is at stake. If before you are in safety you meet the hideous dandy whom you saw at the inn, fly, for he will give you up at once. For me—" She paused. "For me, I plunge back with pride into the petty cares of life." And then she went on in a low voice, and choking back her tears, "Good-by, sir! May you be happy! Good-by!" And she beckoned to Captain Merle, who was just reaching the brow of the hill.

The young man was not prepared for so sudden an ending.

"Wait!" he cried, with a kind of despair, cleverly enough feigned. The girl's strange whim surprised the stranger so much that, though he would at the moment have laid down his life for her, he devised a most reprehensible trick in order at once to hide his name and to satisfy Mademoiselle de Verneuil's curiosity.

"You have nearly guessed it," he said. "I am an emigrant, under sentence of death, and I am called the Vicomte de Bauvan. Love of my country has brought me back to France, to my brother's side. I hope to have my name erased from the list by the aid of Madame de Beauharnais, now the First Consul's wife; but if I do not succeed in this, then I will die on my natal soil, fighting by the side of my friend Montauran. My first object is to go and see, with the aid of a passport which he has given me, whether any of my estates in Brittany remain to me."

As the young noble spoke, Mademoiselle de Verneuil examined him with her keen eye. She tried to doubt the truth of his words; but, lulled iuto credulous confidence, she slowly regained her serene expression, and cried, "Sir! is what you are telling me true?"

"Perfectly true," replied the stranger, whose standard of honor in dealing with women did not appear to be high.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil drew a deep sigh like one who comes back to life.

"Ah!" cried she, "I am quite happy."

"Then do you hate my poor Montauran very much?"

"No," said she. "You cannot understand me. I could not wish *you* to be exposed to dangers against which I will try to defend *him*, since he is your friend."

"Who told you that Montauran is in danger?"

"Why, sir, even if I did not come from Paris, where every one is talking of his enterprise, the commandant at Alencon said enough to us about him, I should think."

"Then I must ask you how you can preserve him from danger?"

"And suppose I do not choose to answer?" said she, with the air of disdain under which women know so well how

to conceal their emotions. "What right have you to know my secrets?"

"The right which belongs to a man who loves you."

"What, already?" she said. "No, sir, you do not love me! You see in me an object of passing gallantry, that is all. Did I not understand you at once? Could any one who has been accustomed to good society make a mistake, in the present state of manners, when she heard a cadet of the École Polytechnique pick his words, and disguise as clumsily as you did, the breeding of a gentleman under a Republican outside? Why, your very hair has a trace of powder, and there is an atmosphere of gentility about you which any woman of fashion must perceive at once. Therefore, trembling lest my overseer, who is as sharp as a woman, should recognize you, I dismissed him at once. Sir, a real Republican officer, who had just left the École Polytechnique, would not fancy himself about to make a conquest of me, or take me for a pretty adventuress. Permit me, Monsieur de Bauvan, to lay before you some slight considerations of woman's wit on this point. Are you so young as not to know that of all creatures of our sex the most difficult to conquer is she whose price is quoted in the market, and who is already weary of pleasure? Such a woman, they say, requires immense efforts to win her, and yields only to her own caprices. To try to excite affection in her is the *ne plus ultra* of coxcombry. Putting aside this class of women, with whom you are gallant enough (since they are all bound to be beautiful) to rank me, do you not understand that a girl, young, well-born, beautiful, witty (you allow me all these gifts), is not for sale, and can be won only in one way—by loving her? You understand me? If she loves and chooses to stoop to folly, she must at least have some greatness of feeling to excuse her. Pardon me this lavishness of logic, so rare with those of our sex. But for the sake of your happiness, and," she added, with a bow, "of mine, I would not have either of us deceived as to the other's real worth, nor would I have you think Mademoiselle de Verneuil, be she angel or fiend, woman or girl, capable of being caught with commonplace gallantries."

"Mademoiselle," said the pretended viscount, whose surprise, though he concealed it, was immense, and who at once became a man of the finest manners, "I beg you to believe that I take you for a very noble person, great of heart, and full of lofty sentiments, or for a kind girl, just as you choose."

"That is more than I ask for, sir," she said, laughing. "Leave me my incognito. Besides, I wear my mask better than you do, and it pleases me to keep it on, were it only for the purpose of knowing whether people who talk to me of love are sincere. . . . Therefore, do not play too bold strokes with me. Listen, sir," she added, grasping his arm firmly, "if you could convince me that you love me truly, no power on earth should tear us asunder. Yes! I would gladly throw in my lot with some man's great career, wed with some huge ambition, share some high thoughts. Noble hearts are not inconstant, for fidelity is one of their strong points. I should be loved always, always happy. But I should not be always ready to make myself a ladder whereon my beloved might mount, to sacrifice myself for him, to bear all from him, to love him always, even when he had ceased to love me. I have never yet dared to confide to another heart the wishes of my own, the passionate enthusiasm which consumes me; but I may say something of the sort to you, since we shall part as soon as you are in safety."

"Part? Never!" he cried, electrified by the speech of this energetic soul, that seemed wrestling with mighty thoughts.

"Are you your own master?" replied she, with a disdainful glance, which brought him to his level.

"My own master? Yes, except for my sentence of death."

"Then," she said, with a voice full of bitter feeling, "if all this were not a dream, how fair a life were ours! But if I have talked follies, let us do none. When I think of all that you should be if you

are to rate me at my just worth, everything seems to me doubtful."

"And I should doubt of nothing if you would be mine."

"Hush!" she cried, hearing these words spoken with a true accent of passion. "The fresh air is getting really too much for you; let us go to our chaperons."

The coach was not long in catching the couple up; they took their seats once more, and for some leagues journeyed in profound silence. But if both had gathered matter for abundant thought, their eyes were no longer afraid of meeting. Both seemed equally concerned in watching each other and in hiding important secrets, but both felt the mutual attraction of a desire which, since their conversation, had acquired the strength and range of a passion; for each had recognized in the other qualities which promised in their eyes yet livelier delights—it might be from conflict, it might be from union. Perchance each of them, already launched on an adventurous career, had arrived at that strange condition of mind when, either out of mere weariness or as a challenge to fate, men simply decline to reflect seriously on their situation, and abandon themselves to the chapter of accidents as they pursue their object, precisely because exit seems hopeless, and they are content to wait for the fated ending. Has not moral, like physical nature, gulfs and abysses, where strong minds love to plunge at the risk of life, as a gambler loves to stake his whole fortune?

The young noble and Mademoiselle de Verneuil had, as it were, a glimpse of such ideas as these, which both shared, after the conversation of which they were the natural sequel; and thus they made a sudden and vast stride in intimacy, the sympathy of their souls following that of their senses. Nevertheless, the more fatally they felt themselves drawn each to the other, the more interest they took in mutual study, were it only to augment, by the result of unconscious calculation, the amount of their future joys. The young man, still astonished at the strange girl's depth of thought, asked himself first how she managed to combine so much acquired knowledge with so much freshness and youth. Next he thought that he could discern a certain strong desire of appearing innocent in the extreme innocence with which Marie endeavored to imbue her ways; he suspected her of feigning, found fault with himself for his delight, and tried to see in the strange lady nothing but a clever actress. He was right. Mademoiselle de Verneuil, like all young women who have gone much into society, increased her apparent reserve the warmer were her real feelings, and assumed in the most natural way in the world the prudish demeanor under which women are able to veil their most violent desires. All of them would, if they could, present a virgin front to passion; and if they cannot, their semblance of it is still a homage paid to their love. The young noble thought all this rapidly enough, and it pleased him. For both, in fact, this exchange of study was sure to be an advance in love; and the lover soon came, by means of it, to that phase of passion when a man finds in the very faults of his mistress reasons for loving her more.

The pensiveness of Mademoiselle de Verneuil lasted longer than the emigrant's; it might be that her lively fancy made her look forward to a longer future. The young man merely obeyed a single one of the thousand feelings which his man's life was sure to make him experience; the girl saw her whole life before her, and delighted in arranging it in beauty, in filling it with happiness, with honor, with noble sentiment. Happy in her own thoughts, as much enamored of her dreams as of reality, of the future as of the present, Marie tried to hark back, so as to clinch her hold of the young man's heart—an instinctive movement with her, as with all women. She had made up her mind to surrender entirely; but she still wished, so to say, to haggle over details. She would have willingly revoked everything that she had done—in speech, in glance, in action—during the past, so as to make it harmonize with the dignity of a woman

who is loved. And so her eyes exhibited now and then a kind of affright, as she thought of the past conversation in which she had taken so high a ground. But as she looked on his face—so full of vigor—she thought that such a being must be generous as he was strong; and felt herself happy in a lot fairer than that of most other women, in that she had found a lover in a man with a character of his own—a man who, despite the sentence of death hanging over his head, had come of his own accord to stake it, and to make war against the Republic. The thought of unshared dominion over such a soul soon presented the color of all actual things quite differently to her.

There was the difference of a dead and a living universe between the time when, some five hours earlier, she had made up her face and voice to serve as baits for this gentleman, and the present moment, when a look of hers could overcome him. Her cheerful laughs, her gay coquetries, hid a depth of passion which presented itself, like misfortune, with a smile. In the state of mind in which Mademoiselle de Verneuil then was, outward existence seemed to her a mere phantasmagoria. The coach passed villages, valleys, hills, whereof no impression charged her memory. She came to Mayenne; the soldiers of the escort were relieved. Merle spoke to her, she answered, she crossed the city, she began her journey afresh; but faces, houses, streets, landscapes, men, slipped by her like the unsubstantial shapes of a dream. Night fell. But Marie traveled on under a starry heaven, wrapped in soft light, along the Fougères road, without even thinking that the face of the sky had changed, without even knowing what Mayenne meant, what Fougères, or whither she was going. That she might in a few hours be parted from the man she had chosen, and who, as she thought, had chosen her, did not enter her thoughts as possible. Love is the only passion which knows nothing of past or future. If at times her thoughts translated themselves into words, the words which escaped her were almost destitute of meaning. Yet still they echoed in her lover's heart like a promise of delight. Both witnesses of this birth of passion saw that it grew with terrible rapidity. Francine knew Marie as well as the strange lady knew the young man; and their knowledge of the past filled them with silent expectation of some alarming catastrophe. Nor, as a matter of fact, were they long in seeing the end of the drama to which Mademoiselle de Verneuil had given, perhaps unconsciously, the ominous name of tragedy.

The four travelers had journeyed about a league beyond Mayenne, when they heard a horseman galloping at the top of his speed toward them. He had no sooner caught up the carriage than he stooped to gaze at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who recognized Corentin. This sinister person permitted himself a meaning gesture, the familiar nature of which was a kind of insult, and disappeared, after striking her blood cold with this vulgar signal. The incident seemed to strike the emigrant disagreeably, and certainly did not escape his so-called mother; but Marie touched him lightly and, by a glance, seemed to implore a refuge in his heart, as if it were the only asylum open to her on earth. The young man's brow cleared as he felt the pleasurable influence of the gesture, in which his mistress had revealed, as though by oversight, the extent of her attachment. A fear which she did not understand had banished all her coquetry, and for an instant love showed himself unveiled; they seemed not to dare to speak, as if for fear of breaking the sweet spell of the moment. Unluckily, the watchful eye of Madame du Gua was in their midst; and she, like a miser presiding at a feast, seemed to count their morsels and dole them out their space of life. Given up to their happiness, the two lovers arrived, without consciousness of the long journey they had made, at that part of the road which is at the bottom of the valley of Ernée, the first of the three hollows forming the scene of the events which open our history. There Francine perceived, and pointed out to her mistress, some singular figures which seemed to flit like

shadows across the trees and amid the *ajoncs* which surrounded the fields. But when the carriage came within range of these shadows, a volley of musketry (the balls passing over their heads) told the travelers that there was a solid reality in these apparitions. The escort had fallen into an ambuscade.

At this lively fusillade Captain Merle felt a regret as lively, that he had shared the miscalculation of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who, in her belief that a quick march by night would be exposed to no danger, had only allowed him to take some threescore men. Under Gérard's orders the captain at once divided his little force into two columns, so as to take the two sides of the road, and each officer set out at a brisk run across the fields of broom and *ajoncs*, desirous to engage the enemy without even waiting to discover their numbers. The Blues began to beat these thick bushes to left and to right with a valor by no means tempered with discretion, and replied to the Chouans' attack by a well-sustained fire into the broom-tufts whence the hostile shots came. Mademoiselle de Verneuil's first impulse had been to leap from the coach and run back, so as to put as long a space as possible between herself and the battle-field; but then, ashamed of her fear, and influenced by the natural desire to show nobly in the eyes of a beloved object, she stood motionless, and tried to watch the combat calmly. The emigrant followed her movements, took her hand and placed it on his heart.

"I was afraid," she said, smiling, "but now—"

At that moment her maid exclaimed in a fright, "Marie! take care!" But Francine, who had made as though to spring from the carriage, felt herself stopped by a strong hand, the enormous weight of which drew a sharp cry from her. But when she turned her head and recognized the face of Marche-à-Terre, she became silent.

"To your mistake, then," said the stranger to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "I shall owe the discovery of secrets the sweetest to the heart. Thanks to Francine, I learn that you bear the lovely name of Marie—Marie, the name which I have always invoked in my moments of sorrow! Marie, the name that I shall henceforth invoke in my joy, and which I can never mention without sacrilegiously mingling religion and love. Yet can it be a crime to love and pray at the same time?" As he spoke each clutched the other's hand tight, and they gazed in silence at each other, the very excess of their feeling depriving them of the ability to express it.

"There is no danger for *you*," said Marche-à-Terre roughly to Francine, infusing into his voice, naturally harsh and guttural, a sinister tone of reproach, and emphasizing his words in a manner which struck the innocent peasant with terror. Never before had the poor girl seen ferocity in the looks of Marche-à-Terre. Moonlight seemed the only suitable illumination for his aspect; and the fierce Breton, his bonnet in one hand, his heavy rifle in the other, his form huddled together like a gnome's, and wrapped in those floods of pallid light which give such weird outlines to all shapes, looked a creature of fairy-land rather than of the actual world. The appearance, and the reproach it uttered, had also a ghost-like rapidity. He turned abruptly to Madame du Gua and exchanged some quick words with her, of which Francine, who had almost forgotten her Low-Breton, could catch nothing. The lady appeared to be giving repeated commands to Marche-à-Terre, and the brief colloquy ended by an imperious gesture with which she pointed to the two lovers. Before obeying, Marche-à-Terre cast a final glance at Francine; he seemed to pity her, and to wish to speak to her; but the Breton girl understood that her lover's silence was due to orders. The man's tanned and rugged skin seemed to wrinkle on his forehead, and his eyebrows were strongly contracted. Was he resisting a fresh order to kill Mademoiselle de Verneuil? The grimace no doubt made him look more hideous than ever to Madame du Gua; but the flash of his eye took a gentler meaning for Francine, who, guessing from it that her woman's will could still

master the energy of this wild man, hoped still to reign, under God, over his savage heart. The sweet converse in which Marie was engaged was interrupted by Madame du Gua, who came up and caught hold of her, uttering a cry as if there were some sudden danger. But her real object was merely to give one of the members of the Alencon Royalist committee, whom she recognized, an opportunity of speaking freely to the emigrant.

"Do not trust the girl you met at 'The Three Moors.'"

Having whispered these words in the young man's ear, the Chevalier de Valois, mounted on a Breton pony, disappeared in the broom from which he had just emerged. At the same moment the musketry swelled into a rolling fire of astonishing briskness, but no close fighting took place.

"Adjutant," said Clef-des-Cœurs, "may it not be a feigned attack, in order to carry off our travelers, and put them to ransom?"

"The devil take me if you have not hit it!" cried Gérard, hastening back to the road.

But at the same time the Chouans' fire slackened, for the real object of the skirmish had been to effect the communication which the chevalier had made to the young man. Merle, who saw them making off in no great numbers across the hedges, did not think it worth while to entangle himself in a struggle which could not be profitable, and might be dangerous; while Gérard with an order or two reformed the escort on the road, and began his march once more, having suffered no losses. The captain had an opportunity of offering his hand to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, that she might take her seat, for the young nobleman remained standing as if thunderstruck. Surprised at this, the Parisian girl got in without accepting the Republican's courtesy. She turned toward her lover, saw his motionless attitude, and was stupefied at the change which the chevalier's mysterious words had produced. The young emigrant came slowly back, and his air showed a deep sense of disgust.

"Was I not right?" whispered Madame du Gua in his ear, as she walked with him back to the carriage; "we are certainly in the hands of a creature who has entered into a bargain for your life. But since she is fool enough to fall in love with you, instead of attending to her business, do not yourself behave childishly, but feign love for her, till we have reached the Vivetière. When we are once there—But can he be actually in love with her already?" said she to herself, seeing the young man motionless in his place, like one asleep.

The coach rolled almost noiselessly along the sandy road. At the first glance that Mademoiselle de Verneuil cast around her, all seemed changed. Death was already creeping upon her love. There was nothing, perhaps, but a mere shade of difference, but such a shade, in the eyes of a loving woman, affords as great a contrast as the liveliest colors. Francine had understood by Marche-à-Terre's look that the destiny of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, over which she had bidden him watch, was in other hands than his; and she exhibited a pale countenance, unable to refrain from tears, when her mistress looked at her. The unknown lady hid but ill, under feigned smiles, the spite of feminine revenge, and the sudden change which her excessive attentions toward Mademoiselle de Verneuil infused into her attitude, her voice, and her features, was of a nature to give alarm to a sharp-sighted person. So Mademoiselle de Verneuil instinctively shuddered, asking herself the while, "Why did I shudder? she is his mother;" and then she trembled all over as she suddenly said to herself, "But is she really his mother?" She saw before her an abyss which was finally illuminated by a last glance which she cast at the stranger. "The woman loves him!" she thought. "But why load me with attentions, after showing me so much coolness? Am I lost? Or is she afraid of me?"

As for the emigrant, he grew red and pale by turns, and preserved a calm ap-

pearance only by dropping his eyes so as to hide the singular emotions which disturbed him. The agreeable curve of his lips was spoiled by their being tightly pinched, and his complexion yellowed with the violence of his stormy thoughts. Mademoiselle de Verneuil could not even discover whether there was any love left amid this rage. But the road, which at this spot was lined with trees, became dark, and prevented the silent actors in this drama from questioning each other with their eyes. The sighing of the wind, the rustle of the tufted trees, the measured pulse of the escort's tramp, gave the scene that solemn character which quickens the heart's beats. It was not possible for Mademoiselle de Verneuil to seek long in vain for the cause of the change. The remembrance of Corentin passed like lightning across her mind, and brought with it the image, as it were, of her true destiny, suddenly appearing before her. For the first time since the morning she reflected seriously on her position. Till that moment she had simply let herself enjoy the happiness of loving without thinking either of herself or of the future. Unable any longer to endure her anguish, she waited with the gentle patience of love for one of the young man's glances, and returned it with one of such lively supplication, with a pallor and a shudder possessing so thrilling an eloquence, that he wavered. But the catastrophe was only the more thorough.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle?" he asked.

The voice without a touch of kindness, the question itself, the look, the gesture, all helped to convince the poor girl that the incidents of the day had been part of a soul-mirage, which was vanishing like the shapeless wreck which the wind carries away.

"Am I ill?" she replied, with a forced laugh. "I was going to put the same question to you."

"I thought you understood each other," said Madame du Gua, with assumed good-humor.

But neither the young nobleman nor Mademoiselle de Verneuil answered. She, doubly offended, was indignant at finding her mighty beauty without might. She knew well enough that at any moment she pleased she could learn the enigma of the situation; but she felt little curiosity to penetrate it, and, for the first time, perhaps, a woman recoiled before a secret. Human life is sadly prolific of circumstances where, in consequence it may be of too deep a study, it may be of some sudden disaster, our ideas lose all coherence, have no substance, no regular starting-point; where the present finds all the bonds cut which unite it to the future and the past. Such was Mademoiselle de Verneuil's state. She reclined, her head bent, in the back of the carriage, and lay like an uprooted shrub, speechless and suffering. She looked at no one, wrapped herself in grief, and abode with such persistence in the strange world of grief where the unhappy take refuge, that she lost sight of things around. Ravens passed, croaking, over the heads of the party, but though, like all strong minds, she kept a corner of her soul for superstitions, she paid no attention to them. The travelers journeyed for some time in total silence.

"Parted already!" thought Mademoiselle de Verneuil to herself. "Yet nothing round me has told tales! Can it be Corentin? He has no interest in doing so. Who has arisen as my accuser? I had scarcely begun to be loved, and lo! the horror of desertion is already upon me. I sowed affection and I reap contempt. Is it my fate, then, always to come in sight of happiness and always to lose it?"

She was feeling a trouble strange to her heart, for she loved really and for the first time. Yet she was not so much given up to her grief but that she could find resources against it in the pride natural to a young and beautiful woman. She had not published the secret of her love—a secret which tortures will often fail to draw forth. She rallied; and, ashamed of giving the measure of her passion by her silent suffering, she shook her head gayly, showed a smiling face, or rather a

smiling mask, and put constraint on her voice to disguise its altered tone.

"Where are we?" she asked of Captain Merle, who still kept his place at a little distance from the coach.

"Three leagues and a half from Fougères, mademoiselle."

"Then, we shall get there soon?" she said, to tempt him to enter on a conversation in which she intended to show the young captain some favor.

"These leagues," answered Merle, overjoyed, "are not very long in themselves; but in this country they take the liberty of never coming to an end. When you reach the summit of the ridge we are climbing, you will perceive a valley like that which we shall soon quit, and on the horizon you will then see the summit of the Pilgrim. Pray God, the Chouans may not try to play a return match there! Now you can understand that in going up and down like this, one does not make much progress. From the Pilgrim you will then see—"

As he spoke, the emigrant started a second time, but so slightly that only Mademoiselle de Verneuil noticed the start.

"What is the Pilgrim?" asked the young lady briskly, interrupting the captain's lecture on Breton topography.

"It is," answered Merle, "a hilltop which gives its name to the valley of Maine, whereupon we are going to enter, and which separates that province from the valley of the Couësnon. At the other end of this valley is Fougères, the first town in Brittany. We had a fight there, at the end of Vendémiaire, with the Gars and his brigands. We were escorting isome conscripts, who, to save themselves from leaving their country, wanted to kill us on the border line. But Hulot is an ugly customer, and he gave them—"

"Then, you must have seen the Gars?" asked she. "What sort of a man is he?"

And as she spoke she never took her piercing and sarcastic glance off the pretended Viscount de Bauvan.

"Well, really, mademoiselle," said Merle, who was doomed to be interrupted, "he is so like the Citizen du Gua that if he did not wear the uniform of the École Polytechnique, I would bet that it is he."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil gazed at the young man, who, cool and motionless, continued to regard her with contempt. She saw nothing in him that could betray a feeling of fear; but she let him know by a bitter smile that she was discovering the secret he had so dishonorably kept. And then, in a mocking voice, her nostrils quivering with joy, her head on one side, so as to look at Merle and examine the young noble at the same time, she said to the Republican:

"The First Consul, captain, is very much concerned about this chief. He is a bold man, they say; only, he has a habit of too giddily undertaking certain enterprises, especially when women are concerned."

"That is just what we reckon upon," said the captain, "to pay off our score with him. Let us get hold of him for only a couple of hours, and we will put a little lead into his skull. If he met us, the gentleman from Coblentz would do the same by us, and send us to the dark place, and so one good turn deserves another."

"Oh!" said the emigrant, "there is nothing to fear. Your soldiers will never get as far as the Pilgrim—they are too weary—and, if you please, they can rest but a step from here. My mother alights at the Vivetière, and there is the road to it some gunshots off. These two ladies will be glad to rest; they must be tired after coming without a halt from Alencon here. And since mademoiselle," said he, turning with forced politeness toward her, "has been so generous as to impart to our journey at once safety and enjoyment, she will perhaps condescend to accept an invitation to sup with my mother? What is more, captain," he added, addressing Merle, "the times are not so bad but that a hogshead of cider may turn up at the Vivetière for your men to tap. The Gars can hardly have made a clean sweep; at least, my mother thinks so—"

"Your mother?" interrupted Mademoiselle de Verneuil, ironically catching him

up, and making no reply to the unusual invitation which was made to her.

"Has the evening made my age incredible to you, mademoiselle?" answered Madame du Gua. "I was unfortunate enough to be married very young; my son was born when I was fifteen—"

"Surely you mistake, madame; do you not mean thirty?"

Madame du Gua grew pale, as she had to swallow this insult; she would have given much for vengeance, but found herself obliged to smile, for she was anxious at any price, even that of suffering the most biting epigrams, to find out what the girl's real intentions were, and so she pretended not to have understood.

"The Chouans have never had a more cruel leader than the Gars, if we are to believe the reports about him," said she, addressing Francine and her mistress at the same time.

"Oh! I do not think him cruel," answered Mademoiselle de Verneuil; "but he knows how to tell falsehoods, and seems to me very credulous. Now, a partisan chief should be no one's dupe."

"You know him, then?" asked the young emigrant, coldly.

"No," she replied, with a disdainful glance at him; "I *thought* I knew him—"

"Oh! mademoiselle, he is certainly a keen hand," said the captain, shaking his head, and giving to the word he used (*malin*), by an expressive gesture, the special shade of meaning which it then had and has now lost. "These old stocks sometimes throw off vigorous suckers. He comes from a country where the *ci-devants* are, they say, not exactly in clover; and men, you see, are like medlars—they ripen on the straw. If the fellow keeps his wits about him, he may give us a long dance. He has found out the way to meet our free companies with light companies, and to neutralize all the Government's attempts. If we burn a Royalist village, he burns two belonging to Republicans. He is carrying on operations over an immense area; and thus obliges us to employ a great number of troops at a moment when we have none to spare. Oh! he knows his business."

"He is the assassin of his country!" said Gérard, interrupting the captain with a deep voice.

"But," said the young noble, "if his death will deliver the country, shoot him as soon as you can."

Then he plunged his glance into Mademoiselle de Verneuil's soul, and there passed between them one of those scenes without words whose dramatic vivacity and intangible finesse speech can very imperfectly render. Danger makes men interesting, and when it is a question of life and death, the vilest criminal always excites a little pity. Therefore, though Mademoiselle de Verneuil was now confident that her scornful lover was this redoubted chief, she would not ascertain the fact at the moment by procuring his execution. She had another curiosity to satisfy, and preferring to make her passion the standard of her faith or doubt, began a game of hazard with danger. Her glance, steeped in treacherous scorn, triumphantly pointed out the soldiers to the young chief, and, while holding up the image of his peril before him, she took pleasure in impressing on him the painful thought that his life depended on a word, and that her lips were on the point of opening to pronounce it. Like an Indian savage, she seemed to put the very lineaments of her enemy to the question as he was bound to the stake, and shook her tomakawk delicately. as though relishing a vengeance innocent in effect, and punishing like a mistress who still loves.

"Had I a son like yours," she said to the strange lady, who was in evident alarm, "I should begin to wear mourning for him on the day when I exposed him to danger."

She received no answer, and though she turned her head a score of times, first toward the officers, and then sharply back toward Madame du Gua, she could not catch between her and the Gars any secret signal which assured her of a correspondence which she at once suspected and wished not to suspect—so pleasant is it to a woman to remain undecided in a life and death struggle when the word of decision is hers. The young general wore

the calmest of smiles, and endured without flinching the torture to which Mademoiselle de Verneuil put him. His attitude, and the expression of his features, spoke a man careless of the danger to which he had knowingly exposed himself, and now and then he seemed to say: "Here is an opportunity of avenging your wounded vanity. Seize it! I should be in despair at having to relinquish my contempt for you." Mademoiselle de Verneuil on her side scrutinized the chief from the height of her vantage with, in appearance, a mixture of insolence and dignity—in appearance only, for at the bottom of her heart she admired his cool intrepidity. Delighted at discovering that her lover bore an ancient name (for privilege of this kind pleases all women), she felt an added pleasure at meeting him in a situation where, defending a cause ennobled by misfortune, he was wrestling with all the might of a strong soul against the Republic which had so often prevailed, and at seeing him grappling with danger and showing the prowess which has such power over women's hearts. So she tried him afresh a score of times, following perhaps the instinct which leads a woman to play with her victim as a cat plays with the captured mouse.

"On what legal authority do you doom the Chouans to death?" asked she of Merle.

"Why, on that of the law of the 14th of last Fructidor, which outlaws the revolted departments and establishes courts-martial in them," replied the Republican.

"What is the immediate reason which gives me the honor of your attention?" said she to the young chief, who was examining her carefully.

"It is a feeling which a gentleman cannot express to any woman, whosoever she be," answered the Marquis of Montauran, in a low voice, stooping toward her. "It was worth while," added he aloud, "to live at this time, in order to see girls*

playing the executioner, and outvying him in their ax-play."

She gazed at Montauran; then, delighted at receiving a public insult from the man at the moment when his life was in her hands, she said in his ear, with a laugh of gentle mockery, "Your head is not good enough. No executioner would care for it, and I will keep it for myself."

The astonished marquis stared for some time at this strange girl, whose love was still the lord of all, even of the most stinging insults, and who took her vengeance by pardoning an offense which women never forgive. His eyes lost something of their cold severity, and a touch of melancholy suffused his features. His passion was already stronger than he himself knew. Mademoiselle de Verneuil, contented with this pledge, slight as it was, of the reconciliation she had sought, gave the chief a tender look, threw at him a smile which was very like a kiss, and then lay back in the carriage, unwilling to play any more tricks with the future of this comedy of happiness, and thinking that she had knitted his bonds afresh by the smile. She was so beautiful! She was so cunning in making the course of love run smooth! She was so accustomed to take everything in sport, to walk as chance chose! She was so fond of the unforeseen and the storms of life!

In accordance with the marquis's orders, the carriage shortly after left the highway, and made for the Vivetière along a hollow lane shut in by high slopes planted with apple trees, which turned it into a ditch rather than a road. The travelers left the Blues behind them to make their slow way to the manor-house, whose gray roofs appeared and disappeared by turns between the trees of the lane, where not a few soldiers had to fall out to wrench their shoes from the tenacious clay.

"This looks very much like the road to Paradise!" cried Beau-Pied.

Thanks to the postilion, who knew his way, no long time passed before Made-

* There is no word in which French has a more unfair advantage over its translators than the double sense of *fille*, which can be used indifferently in the same breath as simply "girl," and as conveying a gross insult. It may not be an enviable privilege, but it exists. The somewhat similar play on *mauvaise tête* 'below' is less idiomatic.

moiselle de Verneuil saw the Chateau de la Vivetière. The house, perched on a kind of promontory, was defended and surrounded by two deep ponds, which left no way of access but by following a narrow causeway. The part of the peninsula on which the buildings and the gardens lay was further protected for a certain distance behind the chateau by a wide moat, receiving the overflow of the ponds with which it communicated. It was thus in fact an almost impregnable island, and an invaluable refuge for any leader, since he could not be surprised except by treachery. As she heard the rusty hinges of the gate creak, and passed under the pointed arch of the gateway, which had been in ruin since the late war, Mademoiselle de Verneuil put her head out, and the sinister colors of the picture which met her eyes almost effaced the thoughts of love and of coquetry with which she had been lulling herself. The carriage entered a large courtyard, almost square in shape, and inclosed by the steep banks of the ponds. These wild embankments, bathed by waters covered with huge green patches, were unadorned save by leafless trees of aquatic species, whose stunted trunks and huge tufted heads, rising above rushes and brushwood, resembled grotesque statues. These uncomely hedges seemed endowed with life and speech as the frogs left them croaking, and the water-hens, awaked by the noise of the coach, fluttered flapping over the surface of the ponds. The courtyard, surrounded by tall, withered grass, by *ajoncs*, by dwarf and climbing shrubs, was destitute of all appearance of neatness or splendor. The chateau itself appeared to have been long deserted; the roofs seemed crumbling under their weight of vegetation; the walls, though built of the solid schistous stone which the soil supplies in abundance, were full of cracks to which the ivy clung.

Two wings, connected at right angles by a lofty tower, and facing the pond, made up the whole chateau, whose doors and blinds hanging rotten, whose rusty balustrades and shattered windows seemed likely to fall at the first breath of tempest. The night breeze whistled through the ruins, to which the moon with its uncertain light lent the character and semblance of a huge specter. The colors of this blue and gray granite, contrasted with the black and yellow schist, must have been seen in order to recognize the truth of the image which this dark and empty carcass suggested. Its stones wrenched asunder, its unglazed casements, its crenelated tower, its roofs open to the sky, gave it exactly the air of a skeleton; and the very birds which took to flight hooting gave an additional stroke to this vague resemblance. Some lofty fir trees, planted behind the house, waved their dark foliage above the roof, and some yews, originally trained to give ornament to the corners, now framed it with melancholy drapery-like funeral palls. Lastly, the shape of the doors, the rude style of the ornamentation, the lack of uniformity in the buildings, were all characteristic of one of those feudal manor-houses whereon Brittany prides herself; and not without reason, perhaps, inasmuch as they enrich this Gaelic country with a sort of history in monuments of the shadowy times preceding the general establishment of the monarchy. Mademoiselle de Verneuil, in whose fancy the word "chateau" always took the shape of a conventional type, was struck by the funereal aspect of the picture, jumped lightly from the coach and stood alone, gazing full of alarm, and wondering what she had better do. Francine heard Madame du Gua give a sigh of joy at finding herself out of reach of the Blues, and an involuntary cry escaped her when the gate was shut and she found herself caged in this kind of natural fortress. Montauran had darted quickly to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, guessing the thoughts that occupied her.

"This chateau," said he, with a touch of sadness, "has been shattered by war, as the projects I built for our happiness have been shattered by you."

"How so?" she asked, in deep surprise.

"Are you 'a woman, young, beautiful, *noble*, and witty?'" he said, with a tone of irony, repeating to her the words which she had said to him so coquettishly in their conversation on the road.

"Who has told you the contrary?"

"Some trustworthy friends, who take an interest in my safety and are watching to counterplot treachery."

"Treachery!" she said, in a sarcastic tone. "Are Alencon and Hulot so far off? You seem to lack memory, an awkward defect for a partisan chief. But from the moment when *friends*," she added, with studied insolence, "reign in your heart with such omnipotence—be content with your friends. There is nothing comparable to the pleasures of friendship. Farewell! I will not set foot within these walls, nor shall the soldiers of the Republic."

She darted toward the gate with an impulse of scorn and wounded pride, but her action disclosed a nobility of feeling and a despair which entirely changed the ideas of the marquis, who felt the pain of renouncing his desires too much not to be imprudent and credulous. He too was already in love; and neither of the lovers had any desire to prolong their quarrel.

"Add one word and I will believe you," he said in a beseeching tone.

"One word?" she said ironically, and with clinched lips. "One word? Will not even one gesture do?"

"Scold me at least," said he, trying to seize a hand which she drew away, "if indeed you dare to sulk with a rebel chief who is now as mistrustful and somber as just now he was confiding and gay."

Marie looked at the marquis without anger, and he added:

"You have my secret, and I have not yours."

But at these words her brow of alabaster seemed to darken. Marie cast an angry look at the chief, and answered, "My secret? Never!"

In love, every word and every look has its momentary eloquence, but on this occasion Mademoiselle de Verneuil gave no precise indication of her meaning, and clever as Montauran was, the riddle of the exclamation remained unsolved for him, though her voice had betrayed some extraordinary emotion which must have strongly tempted his curiosity.

"You have," he said, "an agreeable manner of dispelling suspicion."

"Do you still entertain any?" she said, looking him up and down as much as to say, "Have you any rights over me?"

"Mademoiselle," answered the young man, with an air at once humble and firm, "the power which you exercise over the Republican troops, this escort—"

"Ah! you remind me. Shall I and my escort," asked she, with a touch of irony, "will your protectors, I should say, be in safety here?"

"Yes, on the faith of a gentleman. Whoever you are, you and yours have nothing to fear from me."

This pledge was given with an air of such sincerity and generosity that Mademoiselle de Verneuil could not but feel fully reassured as to the fate of the Republicans. She was about to speak, when the arrival of Madame du Gua silenced her. This lady had been able either to hear or to guess part of the conversation between the lovers, and was not a little anxious at finding them in a posture which did not display the least unkindly feeling. When he saw her, the marquis offered his hand to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and started briskly toward the house as if to rid himself of an unwelcome companion.

"I am in their way," said the stranger lady, remaining motionless where she stood, and gazing at the two reconciled lovers as they made their way slowly toward the entrance-stairs, where they halted to talk as soon as they had put a certain distance between her and themselves. "Yes! yes! I am in their way," she went on, speaking to herself; "but in a little time the creature shall be no more in mine! By Heaven! the pond shall be her grave. Shall I not keep your 'faith of a gentleman' for you? Once under water, what has any one to fear? Will she not be *safe* there?"

She was gazing steadily at the clear mirror of the little lake on the right when suddenly she heard the brambles on the bank rustle, and saw by moonlight the face of Marche-à-Terre rising behind the knotty trunk of an old willow. Only

those who knew the Chouan could have made him out in the midst of this crowd of pollarded stumps, among which his own form easily confounded itself. Madame du Gua first threw a watchful look around her. She saw the postilion leading his horses off to a stable in the wing of the chateau which faced the bank where Marche-à-Terre was hidden; while Francine was making her way toward the two lovers, who at the moment had forgotten everything on earth. Then the strange lady stepped forward with her finger on her lips to insist on complete silence; after which the Chouan understood rather than heard the following words:

"How many of you are here?"

"Eighty-seven."

"*They* are only sixty-five."

"Good!" said the savage, with ferocious satisfaction.

Then the Chouan, who kept an eye on Francine's least movement, dived behind the willow bark as he saw her turn back to look for the female foe of whom she was instinctively watchful.

Seven or eight persons, attracted by the noise of the carriage-wheels, showed themselves on the top of the front stairway, and cried, "'Tis the Gars! 'Tis he! Here he is!" At this cry others ran up, and their presence disturbed the lovers' talk. The Marquis of Montauran advanced hastily toward these gentlemen, and bade them be silent with a commanding gesture, pointing out to them the head of the avenue where the Republican troops were debouching. At sight of the well-known blue uniforms faced with red and the flashing bayonets, the astounded conspirators cried:

"Have you come to betray us?"

"If I had I should hardly warn you of the danger," answered the marquis, smiling bitterly. "These Blues," he continued, after a pause, "are the escort of this young lady, whose generosity has miraculously delivered us from the danger to which we had nearly fallen victims in an inn at Alencon. We will tell you the story. Mademoiselle and her escort are here on my parole, and must be received as friends."

Madame du Gua and Francine having arrived at the steps, the marquis gallantly presented his hand to Mademoiselle de Verneuil. The group of gentlemen fell back into two rows, in order to give them passage, and all strove to distinguish the stranger's features; for Madame du Gua had already heightened their curiosity by making some private signals. Mademoiselle de Verneuil beheld in the first apartment a large table handsomely laid for some score of guests. This dining-room communicated with a large salon in which the company was shortly collected. Both chambers were in harmony with the spectacle of ruin which the exterior of the chateau presented. The wainscot, wrought in polished walnut, but of rough, coarse, ill-finished workmanship in very high relief, was wrenched asunder and seemed ready to fall. Its dark hue added yet more to the melancholy aspect of rooms without curtains or mirrors, where a few pieces of ancient and ramshackle furniture matched with the general effect of dilapidation. Marie saw maps and plans lying unrolled on a large table, and in the corners of the room piles of swords and rifles. The whole bore witness to an important conference between the Chouan and Vandean chiefs. The marquis led Mademoiselle de Verneuil to a vast worm-eaten armchair which stood by the fireplace, and Francine placed herself behind her mistress, leaning on the back of the venerable piece of furniture.

"You will excuse me for a moment, that I may do my duty as host?" said the marquis, as he left the couple and mixed in the groups which his guests formed.

Francine saw the chiefs, in consequence of a word from Montauran, hastily hiding their maps, their arms, and everything that could excite the suspicions of the Republican officers; while some laid aside broad belts which contained pistols and hangers. The marquis recommended the greatest possible discretion, and went out with apologies for the necessity of looking after the reception of the troublesome guests that chance was giving him.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who had put her feet to the fire, endeavoring to warm them, allowed Montauran to leave without turning her head, and thus disappointed the expectation of the company, who were all anxious to see her. The gentlemen gathered round the unknown lady, and while she carried on with them a conversation *sotto voce*, there was not one who did not turn round more than once to examine the two strangers.

"You know Montauran," she said, "he fell in love with the girl at first sight; and you can quite understand that the best advice sounded suspicious to him when it came from my mouth. Our friends at Paris, and Messieurs de Valois and d'Esgrignon of Alencon as well, have all warned him of the snare that is being laid for him by throwing some baggage at his head; and yet he takes up with the first he meets—a girl who, according to my information, has stolen a great name in order to disgrace it," and so forth.

This lady, in whom the reader must have already recognized the woman who decided the Chouans on attacking the *turgotine*, shall keep henceforward in our history the appellation which helped her to escape the dangers of her journey by Alencon. The publication of her real name could only offend a distinguished family, already deeply grieved at the misconduct of a daughter whose fate has moreover been the subject of another drama than this. But the attitude of inquisitiveness which the company took soon became impertinent and almost hostile. Some harsh exclamations reached Francine's ear, and she, after whispering to her mistress, took refuge in the embrasure of a window. Marie herself rose, turned toward the insulting group, and cast on them dignified and even scornful glances. Her beauty, her elegant manners, and her haughtiness, suddenly changed the disposition of her enemies, and gained her a flattering murmur of admiration, which seemed to escape them against their will. Two or three men, whose exterior showed those habits of politeness and gallantry which are learned in the exalted sphere of a court, drew near Marie with a good grace. But the modesty of her demeanor inspired them with respect; no one dared to address her, and she was so far from occupying the position of accused, that she seemed to be their judge. Nor had these chiefs of a war undertaken for God and the king much resemblance to the fancy portraits of them which she had amused herself with drawing. The struggle, great as it really was, shrunk and assumed mean proportions in her eyes when she saw before her, with the exception of two or three vigorous faces, mere country squires destitute of character and vivacity. Marie dropped suddenly from poetry to plain prose. The countenances about her gave a first impression rather of a desire to intrigue than of the love of glory. It was self-interest that had really called these gentlemen to arms; and if they became heroic on actual service, here they showed themselves in their natural colors.

The loss of her illusions made Mademoiselle de Verneuil unjust, and prevented her from recognizing the sincere devotion which made some of these men so remarkable. Yet most of them certainly showed a want of distinction in manner, and the few characteristic heads which were notable among them were robbed of grandeur by the formal etiquette of aristocracy. Even though Marie was liberal enough to grant shrewdness and acuteness of mind to these persons, she found in them a complete lack of the magnificent simplicity to which she was accustomed in the successful men of the Republic. This nocturnal assembly, held in the ruined fortalice, under grotesque architectural devices which suited the faces well enough, made her smile as she chose to see in it a picture symbolizing the monarchy. Soon there came to her the delightful thought that at any rate the marquis played the most important part among these folk, whose only merit in her eyes was their devotion to a lost cause. She sketched in fancy the form of her lover among the crowd, pleased herself with setting him off against them, and saw in their thin and meager personalities nothing but tools of his great de-

signs. At this moment the marquis's steps rang in the neighboring room; the conspirators suddenly melted into separate groups, and the whispering ceased. Like school-boys who had been planning some trick during their master's absence, they eagerly feigned good behavior and silence. Montauran entered, and Marie had the happiness of admiring him among these men of whom he was the youngest, the handsomest, the first.

As a king does amid his courtiers, he went from group to group, distributing slight nods, hand-shakes, glances, words of intelligence or reproach, playing his part of party chief with a grace and coolness difficult to anticipate in a young man whom she had at first taken for a mere giddy-pate. The marquis's presence put an end to the inquisitiveness which had been busy with Mademoiselle de Verneuil, but Madame du Gua's ill-nature soon produced its effect. The Baron du Guénic (surnamed *L'Intimé*), who, among all these men assembled by matters of such grave interest, seemed alone entitled by his name and rank to use familiarity with Montauran, took his arm, and led him aside.

"Listen, my dear marquis," said he; "we are all in pain at seeing you about to commit an egregious piece of folly."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Do you know where this girl comes from, who she really is, and what her designs on you are?"

"My dear L'Intimé, be it said between ourselves, my fancy will have passed by to-morrow morning."

"Granted; but how if the baggage gives you up before daybreak?"

"I will answer you when you tell me why she has not done so already," replied Montauran, assuming in jest an air of coxcombry.

"Why, if she likes you, she probably would not care to betray you till *her* fancy, too, has 'passed.'"

"My dear fellow, do look at that charming girl. Observe her ways, and then say, if you dare, that she is not a lady. If she cast favoring eyes on you, would you not in your inmost soul feel some respect for her? A dame whom we know has prejudiced you against her. But after the conversation we have had, if I found her to be one of the wantons our friends speak of, I would kill her."

"Do you think," said Madame du Gua, breaking into the talk, "that Fouché is fool enough to pick up the girl he sends against you at a street-corner? He has proportioned her charms to your ability. But if you are blind your friends must keep their eyes open to watch over you."

"Madame," answered the Gars, darting an angry glance at her, "take care not to attempt anything against this young person, or against her escort, otherwise nothing shall save you from my vengeance. I will have the young lady treated with the greatest respect, and as one who belongs to me. We have, I believe, some connection with the Verneuils."

The opposition with which the marquis met had the usual effect of similar obstacles on young people. Although he had in appearance treated Mademoiselle de Verneuil very cavalierly, and had made believe that his passion for her was a mere caprice, he had just, in an impulse of pride, taken a long step forward. After making the lady's cause his, he found his honor concerned in her being respectfully treated; so he went from group to group giving assurances, after the fashion of a man dangerous to cross, that the stranger was really Mademoiselle de Verneuil; and forthwith all murmurs were silenced. When Montauran had re-established a kind of peace in the salon and had satisfied all exigencies, he drew near Mademoiselle de Verneuil with an eager air, and whispered to her:

"These people have deprived me of some minutes of happiness."

"I am glad to have you near me," answered she, laughing. "I warn you that I am curious; so do not be too tired of my questions. Tell me first who is that good man who wears a green cloth waistcoat?"

"'Tis the well-known Major Brigaut, a man of the Marais, comrade of the late Mercier, called La Vendée."

"And who is the fat, red-faced priest

with whom he is just now talking about me?" went on Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"You want to know what they are saying?"

"*Do* I want to know? Do you call that a question?"

"But I cannot tell you without insulting you."

"As soon as you allow me to be insulted without exacting vengeance for the insults proffered me in your house, farewell, marquis! I will not stay a moment longer here; as it is, I am ashamed of deceiving these poor Republicans who are so loyal and confiding;" and she made some steps, but the marquis followed her.

"My dear Marie, listen to me. On my honor, I silenced their unkind words before knowing whether they are true words or false. Nevertheless, in my situation, when our allies in the Government offices at Paris have warned me to mistrust every kind of woman I meet on my path, telling me at the same time that Fouché has made up his mind to employ some street-walking Judith against me, my best friends may surely be pardoned for thinking that you are too beautiful to be an honest woman—"

And as he spoke the marquis plunged his eyes into those of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who blushed, and could not keep back her tears.

"I deserved this insult," she said. "I would fain see you sure that I am a worthless creature, and yet know myself loved; *then* I should doubt you no more. For my part, I believed you when you deceived me, and you disbelieve me when I speak the truth. Enough of this, sir," she said, frowning, and with the paleness of approaching death on her face; "adieu!"

She dashed from the room with a despairing movement; but the young marquis said in her ear, "Marie! my life is yours!"

She stopped and looked at him. "No! no!" she said. "I am generous. Farewell! I thought not, as I came with you, of my past or of your future. I was mad!"

"What! you leave me at the moment when I offer you my life?"

"You are offering it in a moment of passion, of desire—"

"But without regret, and forever!" said he.

She re-entered the room, and to hide his emotion the marquis continued their conversation: "The fat man whose name you asked me is a redoubtable person. He is the Abbé Gudin, one of those Jesuits who are certainly headstrong enough, and perhaps devoted enough, to remain in France notwithstanding the edict of 1763, which banished them. He is a fire-brand of war in these districts, and the organizer of the association called the Sacred Heart. Accustomed to make religion his tool, he persuades the affiliated members that they will come to life again, and knows how to keep up their fanaticism by clever prophecies. You see, one has to make use of each man's private interest to gain a great end. In that lies the whole secret of politics."

"And the other, in a green old age—the muscular man whose face is so repulsive? There! the man dressed in a tattered lawyer's gown."

"Lawyer! he aspires to the rank of maréchal de camp. Have you never heard speak of Longuy?"

"What! 'tis he?" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, affrighted. "You employ such men as that?"

"Hush! he might hear you. Do you see the other, engaged in criminal conversation with Madame du Gua?"

"The man in black, who looks like a judge?"

"He is one of our diplomatists, La Billardière, son of a counselor in the Breton Parliament, whose real name is something like Flamet, but he is in the princes' confidence."

"And his neighbor, who is just now clutching his clay pipe, and who rests all the fingers of his right hand on the wainscot like a clown?" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, with a laugh.

"You have guessed him, by heavens! 'Tis a former game-keeper of the lady's defunct husband. He commands one of the companies with which I meet the mobile battalions. He and Marche-à-Terre

are perhaps the most conscientious servants that the king has hereabouts."

"But she—who is she?"

"She," continued the marquis, "she is the last mistress that Charette had. She has great influence on all these people."

"Has she remained faithful to him?"

But the marquis made no other answer than a slight grimace, expressing doubt.

"Do you think well of her?"

"Really, you are very inquisitive."

"She is my enemy, because she no longer can be my rival," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, laughing. "I forgive her her past slips; let her forgive me mine. And the officer with the mustaches?"

"Pardon me if I do not name him. He wants to get rid of the First Consul by attacking him arms in hand. Whether he succeeds or not, you will hear of him some day. He will be famous."

"And you have come to take command of people like that?" she said with horror. "These are the king's defenders! Where, then, are the gentlemen, the great lords?"

"Well," said the marquis, somewhat tauntingly, "they are scattered about all the courts of Europe. Who else is enlisting kings, cabinets, armies in the service of the House of Bourbon, and urging them against this Republic, which threatens all monarchies with death, and social order with complete destruction?"

"Ah!" she said, with generous emotion, "be to me henceforth the pure source whence I may draw such further ideas as I must learn. I have no objection to that. But allow me to think that you are the only noble who does his duty by attacking France with Frenchmen, and not with foreign aid. I am a woman, and I feel that if a child of mine struck me in anger, I could pardon him; but if he looked on while a stranger tore me to pieces, I should regard him as a monster."

"You will always be a Republican," said the marquis, delightfully intoxicated by the glowing tones which confirmed his hopes.

"A Republican? I am not that any more. I could not esteem you if you were to submit to the First Consul," she went on; "but neither would I see you at the head of men who put a corner of France to pillage, instead of attacking the Republic in front. For whom are you fighting? What do you expect from a king restored to the throne by your hands? Once upon a time a woman undertook this same glorious task; and the king, after his deliverance, let her be burned alive! These royal folk are the anointed of the Lord, and there is danger in touching consecrated things. Leave God alone to place, displace, or replace them on their purple seats. If you have weighed the reward which will come to you, you are ten times greater in my eyes than I thought you; and if so, you may trample me under your feet if you like; I will gladly permit you to do so."

"You are charming! Do not teach your lessons to these gentlemen, or I shall be left without soldiers."

"Ah! if you would let me convert you, we would go a thousand miles hence."

"These men whom you seem to despise," replied the marquis in a graver tone, "will know how to die in the struggle, and their faults will be forgotten; besides, if my attempts meet with some success, will not the laurels of triumph hide all else?"

"You are the only man here who seems to me to have anything to lose."

"I am not the only one," said he, with real modesty; "there are two new Vendéan chiefs. The first, whom you heard them call Grand-Jacques, is the Comte de Fontaine; the other is La Billardière, whom I have pointed out to you already."

"And do you forget Quiberon, where La Billardière played a very singular part?" said she, struck by a sudden memory.

"La Billardière took on himself a great deal of responsibility; believe me, the service of princes is not a bed of roses."

"Ah! you make me shudder," cried Marie. "Marquis!" she went on, in a tone seemingly indicating a reticence, the mystery of which concerned him personally, "a single instant is enough to destroy an illusion and to unveil secrets on which the life and happiness of many men depend—" She stopped

herself, as if she feared to say too much, and added: "I would fain know that the Republican soldiers are safe."

"I will be prudent," said he, smiling, to disguise his emotion; "but speak to me no more of your soldiers. I have answered for them already, on my honor as a gentleman."

"And after all, what right have I to lead you?" said she; "be you always the master of us two. Did I not tell you that it would put me to despair to be mistress of a slave?"

"My lord marquis," said Major Brigaut, respectfully interrupting this conversation, "will the Blues stay long here?"

"They will go as soon as they have rested," cried Marie.

The marquis, directing inquiring looks toward the company, saw that there was a flutter among them, left Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and allowed Madame du Gua to come and take his place by her side. This lady wore a mask of laughing perfidy, which even the young chief's bitter smile did not disturb. But at the same moment Francine uttered a cry which she herself promptly checked. Mademoiselle de Verneuil, astonished at seeing her faithful country maid flying toward the dining-room, turned her gaze on Madame du Gua, and her surprise increased as she noted the pallor which had spread over the face of her enemy. Full of curiosity to know the secret of this abrupt departure, she advanced toward the recess of the window, whither her rival followed her, with the object of removing the suspicions which her indiscretion might have excited, and smiled at her with an indefinable air of malice, as, after both had cast a glance on the lake and its landscape, they returned together to the fireplace; Marie without having seen anything to justify Francine's flight, Madame du Gua satisfied that her orders were obeyed.

The lake, at the edge of which Marche-à-Terre, like a spirit conjured up by the lady, had appeared in the court, ran to join the moat surrounding the gardens in a series of misty reaches, sometimes broadening into ponds, sometimes contracted like canals in a park. The steeply shelving bank which these clear waters washed was but some fathoms distant from the window. Now Francine, who had been absorbed in watching the black lines sketched by the heads of some old willows on the face of the waters, was gazing half absently at the regular curves which the light breeze gave to their branches. Suddenly it seemed to her that she saw one of these shapes moving on the watery mirror, with the irregular and wilfull motion which shows animal life; the form was vague enough, but seemed to be human.

Francine at first set her vision down to the shadowy outlines which the moonlight produced through the branches; but soon a second head showed itself, and then others appeared in the distance, the small shrubs on the bank bent and rose again sharply, and Francine perceived in the long line of the hedge a gradual motion like that of a mighty Indian serpent of fabulous contour. Next, divers points of light flashed and shifted their position here and there among the brooms and the tall brambles. Marche-à-Terre's beloved redoubled her attention, and in doing so she seemed to recognize the foremost of the black figures which were passing along this animated shore. The man's shape was very indistinct, but the beating of her heart assured her that it was really Marche-à-Terre whom she saw. Convinced by a gesture, and eager to know whether this mysterious movement hid some treachery or not, she darted toward the courtyard, and when she had reached the middle of this green expanse, she scanned by turns the two wings and the two banks without observing any trace of this secret movement in the bank which faced the uninhabited part of the building. She strained her ear, and heard a slight rustle like that which the steps of a wild beast might produce in the silent woods; she shuddered, but she did not tremble. Young and innocent as she still was, curiosity quickly suggested a trick to her. She saw the carriage, ran to it, hid herself in it, and only raised her head with the caution of the hare in

whose ears the echo of the far-off hunt resounds. Then she saw Pille-Miche coming out of the stable. The Chouan was accompanied by two peasants, all three carrying trusses of straw; these they spread out in such a manner as to make a long bed of litter before the deserted wing and parallel to the bank with the dwarf trees, where the Chouans were moving with a silence which gave evidence of the preparation of some hideous stratagem.

"You are giving them as much straw as if they were really going to sleep here. Enough, Pille-Miche, enough!" said a low, harsh voice, which Francine knew.

"*Will* they not sleep there?" answered Pille-Miche, emitting a foolish guffaw. "But are you not afraid that the Gars will be angry?" he added, so low that Francine could not hear him.

"Well, suppose he is angry," replied Marche-à-Terre under his breath; "we shall have killed the Blues all the same. But," he went on, "there is a carriage which we two must run in."

Pille-Miche drew the coach by the pole and Marche-à-Terre pushed one of the wheels so smartly that Francine found herself in the barn, and on the point of being shut up there, before she had had time to reflect on her position. Pille-Miche went forth to help in bringing in the cask of cider which the marquis had ordered to be served out to the soldiers of the escort, and Marche-à-Terre was passing by the coach in order to go out and shut the door, when he felt himself stopped by a hand which caught the long hair of his goatskin. He met certain eyes whose sweetness exercised magnetic power over him, and he stood for a moment as if bewitched. Francine jumped briskly out of the carriage, and said to him in the aggressive tone which suits a vexed woman so admirably.

"Pierre, what was the news you brought to that lady and her son on the highway? What are they doing here? Why are you hiding? I will know all!"

At these words the Chouan's face took an expression which Francine had never known him to wear. The Breton led his innocent mistress to the door-step, and there turning her face toward the white blaze of the moon, he answered, staring at her with a terrible look:

"Yes, Francine, I will tell you, by my damnation! but only when you have sworn on these beads," and he drew an old rosary from underneath the goatskin, "on this relic which you know," he went on, "to answer me truly one single question."

Francine blushed as she looked at the beads, which had doubtless been a love-token between them.

"On this it was," said the Chouan, with a voice full of feeling, "that you swore—" but he did not finish. The peasant girl laid her hand on the lips of her wild lover to silence him.

"Need I swear?" said she.

He took the young girl gently by the hand, gazed at her for a minute and went on: "Is the young lady whom you serve really named Mademoiselle de Verneuil?"

Francine stood with her arms hanging by her sides, her eyelids drooping, her head bent. She was pale and speechless.

"She is a wanton!" continued Marche-à-Terre in a terrible voice. As he spoke the pretty hand tried to cover his lips once more; but this time he started violently back, and the Breton girl saw before her no longer a lover, but a wild beast in all the savagery of its nature. The Chouan's eyebrows were fiercely contracted, his lips were drawn back, and he showed his teeth like a dog at bay in his master's defense. "I left you a flower, and I find you carrion! Ah! why did we ever part? You have come to betray us—to deliver up the Gars!"

His words were rather bellowings than articulate speech. But though Francine was in terror at this last reproach, she summoned courage to look at his fierce face, raised eyes as of an angel to his, and answered calmly: "I will stake my salvation that that is false. These are the notions of your lady there!"

He lowered his eyes in turn. Then she took his hand, turned toward him with a caressing movement, and said: "Pierre, what have we to do with this? Listen

to me: I cannot tell how you can understand anything of it, for I understand nothing! But remember that this fair and noble young lady is my benefactress, that she is yours too, and that we live like two sisters. No harm must ever happen to her when we are by, at least in our life-time. Swear to me that it shall be so. I have no one here to trust to but you!"

"I am not master here!" replied the Chouan, sulkily, and his face darkened. She took hold of his great flapping ears and twisted them gently, as if she was playing with a cat.

"Well," said she, seeing him look less stern, "promise me that you will use all the power you have in the service of our benefactress."

He shook his head, as if doubtful of success, and the gesture made the Breton girl shudder. At this critical moment the escort reached the causeway. The tramp of the soldiers and the rattle of their arms woke the echoes of the courtyard, and seemed to decide Marche-à-Terre.

"I will save her—perhaps," he said to his mistress, "if you can manage to make her stay in the house;" and he added, "Stay you by her there, and observe the deepest silence; if not, I answer for *nothing!*"

"I promise," she answered in her affright.

"Well, then, go in. Go in at once, and hide your fear from everybody, even your mistress."

"Yes."

She pressed the hand of the Chouan, who looked at her with a fatherly air while she flitted lightly as a bird to the entrance steps. Then he plunged into the hedge like an actor who runs into the wings when the curtain rises on a tragedy.

"Do you know, Merle, that this place looks to me just like a mousetrap!" said Gérard, as he reached the chateau.

"I see it myself," said the captain, thoughtfully.

The two officers made haste to post sentries so as to make sure of the gate and the causeway; then they cast mistrustful looks at the banks and the surrounding landscape.

"Bah!" said Merle, "we must either enter this old barrack with confidence or not go in at all."

"Let us go in," said Gérard.

The soldiers, dismissed from the ranks by a word of their leaders, quickly stacked their muskets and pitched the colors in front of the bed of straw, in the midst whereof appeared the cask of cider. Then they broke into groups, and two peasants began to serve out butter and rye-bread to them. The marquis came to receive the two officers, and conducted them to the salon; but when Gérard had mounted the steps and had gazed at the two wings of the building where the old larches spread their black boughs, he called Beau-Pied and Clef-des-Cœurs to him.

"You two are to explore the gardens between you, and to beat the hedges. Do you understand? Then you will post a sentry by the stand of colors."

"May we light our fire before beginning the hunt, adjutant?" said Clef-des-Cœurs; and Gérard nodded.

"Look you, Clef-des-Cœurs," said Beau-Pied, "the adjutant is wrong to run his head into this wasp's-nest. If Hulot was in command he would never have jammed himself up. We are in a kind of stew-pan!"

"You are a donkey," replied Clef-des-Cœurs. "Why, can't you, the king of all sly fellows, guess that this watch-box is the chateau of that amiable young lady after whom our merry Merle, the most accomplished of captains, is whistling? He will marry her; that is as clear as a well-polished bayonet. She will do the demi-brigade credit, a woman like that!"

"True," said Beau-Pied; "and you might add that this cider is good. But I can't drink in comfort in front of these beastly hedges. I seem to be always seeing before me Larose and Vieux-Chapeau as they tumbled into the ditch on the Pilgrim. I shall remember poor Larose's pigtail all my life. It wagged like a knocker on a street door."

"Beau-Pied, my friend, you have too

much imagination for a soldier. You ought to make songs at the National Institute."

"If I have too much imagination," replied Beau-Pied, "you have got none. It will be some time before they make *you* consul!"

A laugh from the soldiers put an end to the conversation, for Clef-des-Cœurs found he had no cartridge in his box as an answer to his adversary.

"Are you going to make your rounds? I will take the right hand," said Beau-Pied.

"All right, I will take the left," answered his comrade; "but wait a minute first. I want to drink a glass of cider; my throat is gummed up like the sticking-plaster on Hulot's best hat."

Now, the left-hand side of the garden, which Clef-des-Cœurs thus neglected to explore at once, was unluckily that very dangerous bank where Francine had seen men moving. All is chance in war.

As Gérard entered the salon and bowed to the company, he cast a penetrating glance on the men of whom that company was composed. His suspicions returned upon his mind with greater strength than ever; he suddenly went to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and said to her in a low tone, "I think you had better withdraw quickly; we are not safe here."

"Are you afraid of anything in *my* house?" she asked, laughing. "You are safer here than you would be at Mayenne."

A woman always answers confidently for her lover; and the two officers were less anxious.

The company immediately went into the dining-room, in spite of some casual mention of a somewhat important guest who was late. Mademoiselle de Verneuil was able, thanks to the usual silence at the beginning of dinner, to bestow some attention on this assembly, which in its actual circumstances was curious enough, and of which she was in a manner the cause, in virtue of the ignorance which women, who are accustomed to take nothing seriously, carry into the most critical incidents of life. One fact suddenly struck her—that the two Republican officers dominated the whole company by the imposing character of their countenances. Their long hair drawn back from the temples, and clubbed in a huge pigtail behind the neck, gave to their foreheads the pure and noble outline which so adorns youthful heads. Their threadbare blue uniforms, with the worn red facings, even their epaulets, flung back in marching, and showing (as they were wont to do throughout the army, even in the case of generals) evidence of the lack of great-coats, made a striking contrast between these martial figures and the company in which they were.

"Ah! there is the nation, there is liberty!" thought she; then, glancing at the Royalists, "and there is a single man, a king, and privilege!"

She could not help admiring the figure of Merle, so exactly did the lively soldier answer to the type of the French warrior who can whistle an air in the midst of bullets, and who never forgets to pass a joke on the comrade who makes a blunder. Gérard, on the other hand, had a commanding presence, grave and cool. He seemed to possess one of those truly Republican souls who at the time thronged the French armies, and, inspiring them with a spirit of devotion as noble as it was unobtrusive, impressed on them a character of hitherto unknown energy.

"There is one of those who take long views," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil; "they take their stand on the present, and dominate it; they destroy the past, but it is for the good of the future."

The thought saddened her, because it did not apply to her lover, toward whom she turned, that she might avenge herself by a fresh feeling of admiration on the Republic, which she already began to hate. As she saw the marquis surrounded by men, bold enough, fanatical enough, and gifted with sufficient power of speculating on the future, to attack a vigorous Republic, in the hope of restoring a dead monarchy, a religion laid under interdict, princes errant, and privileges out of date, she thought, "He at least looks as far as

the other, for, amid the ruins where he ensconces himself, he is striving to make a future out of the past."

Her mind, feeding full on fancies, wavered between the new ruins and the old. Her conscience indeed warned her one man was fighting for a single individual, the other for his country; but that sentiment had carried her to the same point at which others arrive by a process of reasoning—to the acknowledgment that the king *is* the country.

The marquis, hearing the step of a man in the salon, rose to go and meet him. He recognized the belated guest, who, surprised at his company, was about to speak. But the Gars hid from the Republicans the sign which he made desiring the new-comer to be silent and join the feast. As the two officers studied the countenances of their hosts, the suspicions which they had first entertained revived. The Abbé Gudin's priestly garb and the eccentricity of the Chouans' attire, alarmed their prudence; they became more watchful than ever, and soon made out some amusing contrasts between the behavior and the language of the guests. While the Republicanism which some showed was exaggerated, the ways of others were aristocratic in the extreme. Some glances which they caught passing between the marquis and his guests, some phrases of double meaning indiscreetly uttered, and, most of all, the full round beards which adorned the throats of several guests, and which were hidden awkwardly enough by their cravats, at last told the two officers a truth which struck both at the same moment. They communicated their common thought to each other by a single interchange of looks; for Madame du Gua had dexterously divided them, and they were confined to eye-language. Their situation made it imperative that they should behave warily, for they knew not whether they were masters of the chateau or had fallen into an ambuscade—whether Mademoiselle de Verneuil was the dupe or the accomplice of this puzzling adventure.

But an unforeseen event hastened the catastrophe before they had had time to estimate its full gravity. The new guest was one of those high-complexioned persons, squarely built throughout, who lean back as they walk, who seem to make a commotion in the air around them, and who think that every one will take more looks than one as they pass. Despite his rank, he had taken life as a joke which one must make the best of; but though a worshiper of self, he was good-natured, polite, and intelligent enough after the fashion of those country gentlemen who, having finished their education at court, return to their estates, and will not admit the idea that they can even in a score of years have grown rusty there. Such men make a grave blunder with perfect self-possession, say silly things in a witty way, distrust good fortune with a great deal of shrewdness, and take extraordinary pains to get themselves into a mess. When, by plying knife and fork in the style of a good trencherman, he had made up for lost time, he cast his eyes over the company. His astonishment was redoubled as he saw the two officers, and he directed a questioning glance at Madame du Gua, who by way of sole reply pointed Mademoiselle de Verneuil out to him. When he saw the enchantress whose beauty was already beginning to stifle the feelings which Madame du Gua had excited in the company's minds, the portly stranger let slip one of those insolent and mocking smiles which seem to contain the whole of an equivocal story. He leaned toward his neighbor's ear, saying two or three words, and these words, which remained a secret for the officers and Marie, journeyed from ear to ear, from lip to lip, till they reached the heart of him on whom they were to inflict a mortal wound. The Vendéan and Chouan chiefs turned their glances with merciless curiosity on the Marquis of Montauran, while those of Madame du Gua, flashing with joy, traveled from the marquis to the astonished Mademoiselle de Verneuil. The officers interrogated each other anxiously but mutely, as they waited for the end of this strange scene. Then, in a moment, the forks ceased to play in every hand, silence reigned in the

hall, and all eyes were concentrated on the Gars. A frightful burst of rage flushed his face with anger, and then bleached it to the color of wax. The young chief turned to the guest from whom this train of slow match had started, and said in a voice that seemed muffled in crape:

"Death of my life! Count, is that true?"

"On my honor," said the count, bowing gravely.

The marquis dropped his eyes for a moment, and then, raising them quickly, directed them at Marie, who was watching the struggle, and received a deadly glance.

"I would give my life," said he in a low tone, "for instant vengeance!"

The mere movement of his lips interpreted this phrase to Madame du Gua, and she smiled on the young man as one smiles at a friend whose misery will soon be over. The scorn for Mademoiselle de Verneuil which was depicted on every face put the finishing touch to the wrath of the two Republicans, who rose abruptly.

"What do you desire, citizens?" asked Madame du Gua.

"Our swords, *citizeness*," said Gérard with sarcasm.

"You do not need them at table," said the marquis coldly.

"No; but we are about to play a game which you know," answered Gérard.* "We shall have a little closer view of each other than we had at the Pilgrim!"

The assembly was struck dumb; but at the same moment a volley, discharged with a regularity appalling to the officers, crashed out in the courtyard. They darted to the entrance steps, and thence they saw some hundred Chouans taking aim at a few soldiers who had survived the first volley, and shooting them down like hares. The Bretons had come forth from the bank where Marche-à-Terre had posted them—a post occupied at the peril of their lives, for as they executed their movement, and after the last shots died away, there was heard above the groans of the dying the sound of some Chouans falling into the water with the splash of stones dropping into an abyss. Pille-Miche leveled his piece at Gérard, and Marche-à-Terre covered Merle.

"Captain," said the marquis coolly to Merle, repeating the words which the Republican had uttered respecting himself, "*you see, men are like medlars, they ripen on straw.*" And with a wave of his hand he showed him the whole escort of Blues stretched on the blood-stained litter, where the Chouans were dispatching the living and stripping the dead with incredible rapidity. "I was right in telling you that your soldiers would not reach the Pilgrim," added the marquis; "also I think your head will be full of lead before mine is. What say you?"

Montauran felt a hideous desire to sate his rage, and his irony toward the vanquished, the savagery, and even the treachery of this military execution, which had been carried out without his orders, but for which he thus made himself responsible, corresponded with the secret wishes of his heart. In his fury he would have annihilated France itself, and the murdered Blues, with the two officers who were still alive, though all were innocent of the crime for which he was demanding vengeance, were in his hands like the cards which a desperate gamester tears with his teeth.

"I would rather perish thus than triumph like you!" said Gérard, and as he saw his men lying naked in their blood, he cried, "You have foully murdered them!"

"Yes, sir, as Louis XVI. was murdered," replied the marquis sharply.

"Sir," replied Gérard haughtily, "there is a mystery in the trial of a king which you will never comprehend."

"What! bring a king to trial!" cried the marquis excitedly.

"What! bear arms against France!" retorted Gérard in a tone of disdain.

"Nonsense!" said the marquis.

* The text has here *en reparaissant*, "reappearing." It has not been said that Gérard had left the room, nor could he well have done so. The words are probably an oversight.

"Parricide!" cried the Republican.

"Regicide!" returned the other.

"What!" said Merle, merrily enough, "are you seizing the moment of your death to bandy arguments?"

"You say well," said Gérard, coolly, turning once more toward the marquis. "Sir, if it is your intention to kill us, do us at least the favor to shoot us at once."

"How like you!" struck in the captain; "always in a hurry to have done! My good friend, when a man has a long journey to make, and is not likely to breakfast next day, he takes time with his supper."

But Gérard, without a word, walked swiftly and proudly to the wall. Pille-Miche took aim at him, and seeing the marquis motionless, he took his chief's silence for an order, fired, and the adjutant-major fell like a tree. Marche-à-Terre ran forward to share this new booty with Pille-Miche, and they wrangled and grumbled like two hungry ravens over the still warm corpse.

"If you wish to finish your supper, captain, you are free to come with me," said the marquis to Merle, whom he wished to keep for exchange.

The captain went mechanically into the house with the marquis, saying in a low tone, as if reproaching himself, "It is that devil of a wench who is the cause of this! What will Hulot say?"

"Wench!" said the marquis, with a stifled cry; "then she is really and truly a wench?"

It might have been thought that the captain had dealt a mortal blow to Montauran, who followed him pale, gloomy, disordered, and with tottering steps. Meanwhile there had passed in the dining-room another scene, which in the absence of the marquis took so sinister a character that Marie, finding herself without her champion, might reasonably believe in the death-warrant she saw in her rival's eyes. At the sound of the volley every guest had risen save Madame du Gua.

"Do not be alarmed," said she; "'tis nothing. Our folk are only killing the Blues!" But as soon as she saw that the marquis had left the room, she started up. "This young lady here," she cried, with the calmness of smothered fury, "came to carry off the Gars from us. She came to try and give him up to the Republic!"

"Since this morning I could have given him up twenty times over," replied Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "and I saved his life instead."

But Madame du Gua dashed at her rival like a flash of lightning. In her blind excitement she wrenched open the flimsy frogs on the spencer of the girl (who was taken unawares by this sudden assault), violated with brutal hand the sacred asylum where the letter was hidden, tore the stuff, the trimmings, the corset, the chemise, nay, even made the most of this search so as to slake her jealous hatred, and so ardently and cruelly mauled the panting breast of her rival that she left on it the bloody traces of her nails, feeling a delight in subjecting her to so vile a profanation. As Marie feebly attempted to withstand the furious woman, her hood became unfastened and fell, her hair burst its bonds and rolled down in wavy curls, a modest blush glowed on her face, and then two tears made their moist and burning way down her cheeks, leaving her bright eyes brighter still. In short, the disorder of the struggle exposed her shuddering to the gaze of the guests, and the most callous judges must have believed her innocent as they saw her suffer.

Hatred is so blind that Madame du Gua did not notice that no one listened to her, as in her triumph she cried out, "See, gentlemen! have I slandered the horrid creature?"

"Not so very horrid," whispered the portly guest who had been the cause of the misfortune; "for my part, I am uncommonly fond of horrid things like that!"

"Here," continued the vindictive Vendéan lady, "is an order, signed 'Laplace,' and countersigned 'Dubois.'" At these names some persons raised their heads in attention. "And this is its tenor," went on Madame du Gua: "'Citizen commandants of the forces of all ranks, district

administrators, procurators, syndics, and so forth, in the revolted departments, and especially those of the places where the ci-devant Marquis de Montauran, brigand-chief, surnamed the Gars, may be found, are to afford succor and help to the citizeness Marie Verneuil, and to obey any orders which she may give them, each in such matters as concern him, etc., etc.'"

"To think of an opera girl taking an illustrious name in order to soil it with such infamy!" she added. The company showed a movement of surprise.

"The game is not fair if the Republic employs such pretty women against us!" said the Baron du Guénic, pleasantly.

"Especially girls who have nothing left to stake," rejoined Madame du Gua.

"Nothing?" said the Chevalier du Vissard. "Why, mademoiselle has resources which must bring her in a plenteous income!"

"The Republic must be in very merry mood to send ladies of pleasure to lay traps for us!" cried Abbé Gudin.

"But, unluckily, mademoiselle looks for pleasures which kill," said Madame du Gua, with an expression of hideous joy, which denoted the end of her jokes.

"How is it, then, that *you* are still alive, madame?" said the victim, regaining her feet after repairing the disorder of her dress. This stinging epigram produced some respect for so undaunted a martyr, and struck silence on the company. Madame du Gua saw flitting over the chief's lips a sarcastic smile which maddened her; and not perceiving that the marquis and the captain had come in, "Pille-Miche," she said to the Chouan, "take her away, she is my share of the spoil, and I give her to you. Do with her whatever you like."

As she spoke the word "whatever," the company shuddered, for the frightful heads of Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre showed themselves behind the marquis, and the meaning of the intended punishment appeared in all its horror.

Francine remained standing, her hands clasped, her eyes streaming, as if thunderstruck. But Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who in the face of danger recovered all her presence of mind, cast a look of disdain at the assembly, repossessed herself of the letter which Madame du Gua held, raised her head, and with eyes dry, but flashing fire, darted to the door where stood Merle's sword. Here she met the marquis, cold and motionless as a statue. There was no plea in her favor on his face with its fixed and rigid features. Struck to the heart, she felt life become hateful.

So, then, the man who had shown her such affection had just listened to the jeers which had been heaped upon her, and had remained an unmoved witness of the outrage she had suffered when those beauties which a woman keeps as the privilege of love had been subjected to the common gaze. She might perhaps have pardoned Montauran for his contemptuous feelings; she was indignant at having been seen by him in a posture of disgrace. She darted at him a glance full of half-irrational hatred, and felt terrible desires of vengeance springing up in her heart. With death dogging her steps, her impotence choked her. As it were a whirlwind of madness rose to her brain, her boiling blood made her see everything around in the glare of a conflagration; and then, instead of killing herself, she seized the sword, flourished it at the marquis, and drove it on him up to the hilt. But the blade slipped between his arm and his side; the Gars caught Marie by the wrist and dragged her from the room, assisted by Pille-Miche, who threw himself on the mad woman at the moment when she tried to kill the marquis. At this spectacle Francine uttered piercing cries. "Pierre! Pierre! Pierre!" she shrieked in piteous tones, and as she cried she followed her mistress.

The marquis left the company to its astonishment, and went forth, shutting the door after him. When he reached the entrance steps he was still holding the girl's wrist and clutching it convulsively, while the nervous hands of Pille-Miche nearly crushed the bones of her arm; but she felt only the burning grasp of the young chief, at whom she directed a cold gaze.

"Sir," she said, "you hurt me."

But the only answer of the marquis was to stare for a moment at her.

"Have *you*, then, something to take base vengeance for, as well as that woman?" she said; and then seeing the corpses stretched on the straw, she cried with a sudder, "The faith of a gentleman! ha! ha! ha!" and after this burst of hideous laughter, she added, "A happy day!"

"Yes, a happy one," he answered, "and one without a morrow!"

He dropped Mademoiselle de Verneuil's hand, after gazing with a long, last look at the exquisite creature whom he could hardly bring himself to renounce. Neither of these lofty spirits would bend. The marquis perhaps expected tears; but the girl's eyes remained proudly dry. He turned bruskly away, leaving Pille-Miche his victim.

"Marquis!" she said, "God will hear me, and I shall pray Him to give you a happy day without a morrow!"

Pille-Miche, who was somewhat embarrassed with so fair a prey, drew her off gently, and with a mixture of respect and contempt. The marquis sighed, returned to the chamber, and showed his guests the face as of a dead man whose eyes have not been closed.

That Captain Merle should still be there was unintelligible to the actors in this tragedy; and they all looked at him with surprise, their looks questioning each other. Merle observed the Chouans' astonishment, and still keeping up his part, he said to them, with a forced smile:

"I hardly think, gentlemen, that you will refuse a glass of wine to a man who is about to take his last journey." At the very same minute at which these words were spoken, with a Gallic gayety which ought to have pleased the Vendeans, Montauran reappeared, and his pale face and glazed eyes chilled all the guests.

"You shall see," said the captain, "that the dead man will set the living ones going."

"Ah!" said the marquis, with the gesture of a man suddenly awakening, "you are there, my dear court-martial?"

And he handed him a bottle of *vin de grave* as if to fill his glass.

"Ah! no, thanks, citizen marquis. I might lose my head, you see."

At this sally Madame du Gua said to the guests, smiling:

"Come, let us excuse him the dessert."

"You are very severe in your revenge, madame," said the captain. "You forget my murdered friend, who is waiting for me. I bide tryst."

"Captain," said the marquis, throwing his glove to him, "you are a free man. There, that will be your passport. The King's Huntsmen know that one must not kill down all the game."

"Life, by all means!" answered Merle. "But you are wrong. I give you my word that I shall play the game strictly with you. You will get no quarter from me. Clever as you may be, you are not Gérard's equal, and though your head will never make amends to me for his, I must have it, and I will have it."

"Why was he in such a hurry?" retorted the marquis.

"Farewell! I could have drunk with my own executioners, but I cannot stay with the murderers of my friend," said the captain, disappearing, and leaving the guests in astonishment.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say now of the aldermen, the doctors, the lawyers, who govern the Republic?" said the Gars coolly.

"God's death! marquis," answered the Count de Bauvan, "whatever you may say, they are very ill-mannered. It seems to me that that fellow insulted us."

But the captain's sudden retirement had a hidden motive. The girl who had been the subject of so much contumely and humiliation, and who perhaps was falling a victim at the very moment, had, during the scene, shown him beauties so difficult to forget, that he said to himself as he went out:

"If she is a wench, she is no common one; and I can do with her as a wife."

He doubted so little his ability to save her from these savages that his first thought after receiving his own life had

been to take her forthwith under his protection. Unluckily, when he arrived at the entrance, the captain found the courtyard deserted. He looked around him, listened in silence, and heard nothing but the far-off laughter of the Chouans, who were drinking in the gardens while sharing their booty. He ventured to look round the fatal wing in front of which his men had been shot down, and from the corner, by the feeble light of a few candles, he could distinguish the various groups of the King's Huntsmen. Neither Pille-Miche nor Marche-à-Terre nor the young lady was there; but at the same moment he felt the skirt of his coat gently pulled, and turning, he saw Francine on her knees.

"Where is she?" said he.

"I do not know. Pierre drove me away, telling me not to stir."

"Which way have they gone?"

"That way," said she, pointing to the causeway. The captain and Francine then saw in this direction certain shadows thrown by the moonlight on the waters of the lake, and they recognized feminine outlines whose elegance, indistinct as they were, made both their hearts beat.

"Oh, it is she!" said the Breton girl.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil appeared to be quietly standing in the midst of a group whose attitudes indicated discussion.

"They are more than one!" cried the captain. "Never mind; let us go."

"You will get yourself killed to no profit," said Francine.

"I have died once to-day already," answered he lightly. And both bent their steps toward the dark gateway behind which the scene was passing. In the midst of the way Francine halted.

"No! I will go no farther!" said she gently. "Pierre told me not to meddle. I know him; and we shall spoil all. Do what you like, Mr. Officer, but pray depart. If Pierre were to see you with me, he would kill you."

At that moment Pille-Miche showed himself outside the gate, saw the captain, and cried, leveling his gun at him:

"Saint Anne of Auray! the rector of Antrain was right when he said that the Blues made bargains with the devil! Wait a bit; I will teach you to come alive again, I will!"

"Ah! but I have had my life given me," cried Merle, seeing the threat. "Here is your chief's glove."

"Yes! that is just like a ghost!" retorted the Chouan. "*I* won't give you your life. *Ave Maria!*"

He fired, and the bullet hit the captain in the head and dropped him. When Francine drew near Merle she heard him murmur these words: "I had rather stay with them than return without them!"

The Chouan plunged on the Blue to strip him, saying: "The good thing about these ghosts is that they come alive again with their clothes on." But when he saw, after the captain's gesture of showing the chief's glove, this sacred passport in his hand, he stood dumfounded. "I would I were not in the skin of my mother's son!" he cried, and vanished with the speed of a bird.

To understand this meeting, which proved so fatal to the captain, it is necessary to follow Mademoiselle de Verneuil. When the marquis, overcome with despair and rage, abandoned her to Pille-Miche, at that moment Francine convulsively caught Marche-à-Terre's arm, and reminded him with tears in her eyes of the promise he had made her. A few paces from them, Pille-Miche was dragging off his victim, just as he would have hauled after him any worthless burden. Marie, with streaming hair and bowed head, turned her eyes toward the lake; but, held back by a grasp of steel, she was obliged slowly to follow the Chouan, who turned more than once either to look at her or to hasten her steps, and at each turn some festive thought sketched on his face a horrible smile.

"Isn't she *smart?*" he cried, with clumsy emphasis.

As she heard these words, Francine recovered her speech.

"Pierre!" she said.

"Well?"

"Is he going to kill mademoiselle?"

"Not at once," answered Marche-à-Terre.

"But she will not take it quietly, and if she dies, I will die!"

"Ah! very well—you are too fond of her. Let her die!" said Marche-à-Terre.

"If we are ever rich and happy, it is to her that we shall owe our happiness. But what does that matter? Did you not promise to save her from all evil?"

"I will try; but stay you there, and do not budge."

Marche-à-Terre's arm was at once released, and Francine, a prey to the most terrible anxiety, waited in the courtyard. Marche-à-Terre rejoined his comrade at the moment when Pille-Miche had entered the barn and had forced his victim to get into the carriage. He now demanded the help of his mate to run it out.

"What are you going to do with all this?" asked Marche-à-Terre.

"Well, the Grande-Garce has given me the woman; and all she has is mine."

"That is all very well as to the carriage—you will make some money of it; but the woman will scratch your eyes out."

Pille-Miche laughed loudly, and replied:

"Why,* I shall carry her to my place, and tie her hands."

"Well, then, let us put the horses to," said Marche-à-Terre; and a moment later, leaving his comrade to guard the prey, he brought the carriage out of the door on to the causeway. Pille-Miche got in by Mademoiselle de Verneuil, but did not notice that she was gathering herself up for a spring into the lake.

"Hullo! Pille-Miche," cried Marche-à-Terre, suddenly.

"What?"

"I will buy your whole booty from you."

"Are you joking?" asked the Chouan, pulling his prisoner toward him by her skirts as a butcher might pull a calf trying to escape.

"Let me see her: I will make you a bid."

The unhappy girl was obliged to alight, and stood between the two Chouans, each of whom held her by a hand, staring at her as the elders must have stared at Susanna in her bath.

"Will you take," said Marche-à-Terre, heaving a sigh, "will you take thirty good livres a year?"

"You *mean* it?"

"Done!" said Marche-à-Terre, holding out his hand.

"And done! There is plenty in that to get Breton girls with, and smart ones, too! But whose is the carriage to be?" said Pille-Miche, thinking better of it.

"Mine!" said Marche-à-Terre, in a terrific tone of voice; exhibiting the kind of superiority over all his mates which was given him by his ferocious character.

"But suppose there is gold in the carriage?"

"Did you not say 'Done'?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, then, go and fetch the postilion who lies bound in the stable."

"But suppose there is gold in—"

"Is there?" asked Marche-à-Terre roughly of Marie, jogging her arm.

"I have about a hundred crowns," answered Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

At these words the two Chouans exchanged looks.

"Come, good friend, let us not quarrel about a Blue girl," whispered Pille-Miche to Marche-à-Terre. "Let us tip her into the pond with a stone round her neck, and share the hundred crowns!"

"I will give you them out of my share of D'Orgemont's ransom," cried Marche-à-Terre, choking down a growl caused by this sacrifice.

Pille-Miche, with a hoarse cry of joy, went to fetch the postilion, and his alacrity brought bad luck to the captain, who met him. When Marche-à-Terre heard the shot, he rushed quickly to the spot, where Francine, still aghast, was praying by the captain's body, on her knees and with clasped hands, so much terror had

* Balzac has put some jargon in Pille-Miche's mouth. He is said to have written "Les Chouans" on the spot; but *quien*, *itou*, etc., are not, I think, Breton, and are suspiciously identical with the words in the famous *patois*-scenes in Molière's "Don Juan."

the sight of the murder struck into her.

"Run to your mistress," said the Chouan to her abruptly; "she is saved."

He himself hastened to fetch the postilion, returned with the speed of lightning, and, as he passed again by the body of Merle, caught sight of the Gars' glove still clutched convulsively in the dead man's hand.

"O ho!" cried he, "Pille-Miche has struck a foul blow there! He is not sure of living on his annuity!" He tore the glove away, and said to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who had already taken her place in the coach by Francine's side, "Here! take this glove. If any one attacks you on the way, cry 'Oh! the Gars!' show this passport, and no harm will happen to you. Francine," he added, turning to her and pressing her hand hard, "we are quits with this woman. Come with me, and let the devil take her!"

"You would have me abandon her *now?*" answered Francine, in a sorrowful tone.

Marche-à-Terre scratched his ear and his brow; then lifted his head with a savage look in his eyes.

"You are right!" he said. "I will leave you to her for a week. If after that you do not come with me—" He did not finish his sentence, but clapped his palm fiercely on the muzzle of his rifle, and after taking aim at his mistress in pantomime, he made off without waiting for a reply.

The Chouan had no sooner gone than a voice, which seemed to come from the pond, cried in a low tone, "Madame! madame!" The postilion and the two women shuddered with horror, for some corpses had floated up to the spot. But a Blue, who had been hidden behind a tree, showed himself.

"Let me get up on your coach-box, or I am a dead man," said he. "That damned glass of cider that Clef-des-Cœurs would drink has cost more than one pint of blood! If he had done like me, and made his rounds, our poor fellows would not be there floating like barges."

While these things went on without, the chiefs who had been delegated from La Vendée, and those of the Chouans, were consulting, glass in hand, under the presidency of the Marquis of Montauran. The discussion, which was enlivened by frequent libations of Bordeaux, became of serious importance toward the end of the meal. At dessert, when a common plan of operations had been arranged, the Royalists drank to the health of the Bourbons; and just then Pille-Miche's shot gave, as it were, an echo of the ruinous war which these gay and noble conspirators wished to make on the Republic. Madame du Gua started; and at the motion, caused by her delight at thinking herself relieved of her rival, the company looked at each other in silence, while the marquis rose from table and went out.

"After all, he was fond of her," said Madame du Gua sarcastically. "Go and keep him company, Monsieur de Fontaine. He will bore us to extinction if we leave him to his blue devils."

She went to the window looking on the courtyard to try to see the corpse of Marie, and from this point she was able to descry, by the last rays of the setting moon, the coach ascending the avenue with incredible speed, while the veil of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, blown out by the wind, floated from within it. Seeing this, Madame du Gua left the meeting in a rage. The marquis, leaning on the entrance balustrade, and plunged in somber thought, was gazing at about a hundred and fifty Chouans, who, having concluded the partition of the booty in the gardens, had come back to finish the bread and the cask of cider promised to the Blues. These soldiers (new style), on whom the hopes of the Monarchy rested, were drinking in knots; while on the bank which faced the entrance seven or eight of them amused themselves with tying stones to the corpses of the Blues, and throwing them into the water. This spectacle, added to the various pictures made up by the strange costume and savage physiognomies of the reckless and barbarous *gars*, was so singular and so novel to

Monsieur de Fontaine, who had had before him in the Vendéan troops some approach to nobility and discipline, that he seized the occasion to say to the Marquis of Montauran :

"What do you hope to make of brutes like these?"

"Nothing much you think, my dear count?" answered the Gars.

"Will they ever be able to maneuver in face of the Republicans?"

"Never!"

"Will they be able even to comprehend and carry out your orders?"

"Never!"

"Then, what good will they do you?"

"The good of enabling me to stab the Republic to the heart!" answered the marquis in a voice of thunder. "The good of giving me Fougères in three days, and all Brittany in ten! Come, sir!" he continued, in a milder tone; "go you to La Vendée. Let D'Autichamp, Suzannet, the Abbé Bernier, make only as much haste as I do; let them not treat with the First Consul, as some would have me fear; and," he squeezed the Vendéan's hand hard, "in twenty days we shall be within thirty leagues of Paris!"

"But the Republic is sending against us sixty thousand men and General Brune!"

"What, sixty thousand, really?" said the marquis with a mocking laugh. "And what will Bonaparte make the Italian campaign with? As for General Brune, he is not coming. Bonaparte has sent him against the English in Holland; and General Hédouville, the friend of our friend Barras, takes his place here. Do you understand me?"

When he heard the marquis speak thus, Monsieur de Fontaine looked at him with an arch and meaning air, which seemed to reproach with not himself understanding the hidden sense of the words addressed to him. The two gentlemen from this moment understood each other perfectly; but the young chief answered the thoughts thus expressed by looks with an indefinable smile.

"Monsieur de Fontaine, do you know my arms? Our motto is, *Persevere unto death.*"

The count took Montauran's hand, and pressed it, saying: "I was left for dead at the Four-Ways, so you are not likely to doubt me. But believe my experience; times are changed."

"They are, indeed," said La Billardière, who joined them; "you are young, marquis. Listen to me. Not all your estates have been sold—"

"Ah! can you conceive devotion without sacrifice?" said Montauran.

"Do you know the king well?" said La Billardière.

"I do."

"Then, I admire you."

"King and priest are one!" answered the young chief, "and I fight for the faith!"

They parted, the Vendean convinced of the necessity of letting events take their course, and keeping his beliefs in his heart; La Billardière to return to England, Montauran to fight desperately, and to force the Vendeans, by the successes of which he dreamed, to join his enterprises.

The course of events had agitated Mademoiselle de Verneuil's soul with so many emotions that she dropped exhausted, and as it were dead, in the corner of the carriage, after giving the order to drive to Fougères. Francine imitated her mistress's silence, and the postilion, who was in dread of some new adventure, made the best of his way to the high road, and soon reached the summit of the Pilgrim. Then Marie de Verneuil crossed in the dense white fog of early morning the beautiful and spacious valley of the Couësnon, where our story began, and hardly noticed from the top of the hill the schistous rock whereon is built the town of Fougères, from which the travelers were still some two leagues distant. Herself perished with cold, she thought of the poor soldier who was behind the carriage, and insisted, despite his refusals, on his taking the place next Francine. The sight of Fougères drew her for a moment from her reverie; and besides, since the guard at the gate of Saint Léonard refused to allow unknown persons to enter the town, she was obliged to produce her letter from the Govern-

ment. She found herself safe from all hostile attempts when she had entered the fortress, of which, at the moment, its inhabitants formed the sole garrison; but the postilion could find her no better resting-place than the auberge de la Poste.

"Madame," said the Blue whom she had rescued, "if you ever want a saber cut administered to any person, my life is yours. I am good at that. My name is Jean Faucon, called Beau-Pied, sergeant in the first company of Hulot's boys, the seventy-second demi-brigade, surnamed the Mayençaise. Excuse my presumption, but I can only offer you a sergeant's life, since, for the moment, I have nothing else to put at your service." He turned on his heel and went his way, whistling.

"The lower one goes in society," said Marie bitterly, "the less of ostentation one finds, and the more of generous sentiment: a marquis returns me death for life; a sergeant—but there, enough of this!"

When the beautiful Parisian had bestowed herself in a well-warmed bed, her faithful Francine expected, in vain, her usual affectionate good-night; but her mistress, seeing her uneasy, and still standing, made her a sign, full of sadness:

"They call that a day, Francine!" she said. "I am ten years older."

Next morning, as she was getting up, Corentin presented himself to call upon Marie, who permitted him to enter, saying to Francine: "My misfortune must be immense; for I can even put up with the sight of Corentin."

Nevertheless, when she saw the man once more, she felt for the thousandth time the instinctive repugnance which two years' acquaintance had not been able to check.

"Well?" said he, with a smile; "I thought you were going to succeed. Was it not he whom you had got hold of?"

"Corentin," she said slowly, with a pained expression, "say nothing to me about this matter till I speak of it myself."

He walked up and down the room, casting sidelong looks at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, and trying to divine the secret thoughts of this singular girl, whose glance was of force enough to disconcert, at times, the cleverest men. "I foresaw your defeat," he went on, after a minute's silence. "If it pleases you to make your headquarters in this town, I have already acquainted myself with matters. We are in the very heart of Chouanism. Will you stay here?"

She acquiesced with a nod of the head, which enabled Corentin to guess with partial truth the events of the night before.

"I have hired you a house which has been confiscated, but not sold. They are much behindhand in this country, and nobody dared to buy the place, because it belongs to an emigrant who passes for being ill-tempered. It is near Saint Léonard's Church, and 'pon honor, there is a lovely view from it. Something may be done with the cabin, which is convenient. Will you come there?"

"Immediately," cried she.

"But I must have a few hours more to get things clean and in order, so that you may find them to your taste."

"What does it matter?" said she. "I could live, without minding it, in a cloister or a prison. Nevertheless, pray manage so that I may be able to rest there this evening in the most complete solitude. There! leave me. Your presence is intolerable. I wish to be alone with Francine, with whom I can perhaps get on better than with myself. Farewell! Go! do go!"

These words, rapidly spoken, and dashed by turns with coquetry, tyranny, and passion, showed that she had recovered complete tranquillity. Sleep had no doubt slowly expelled her impressions of the day before, and reflection determined her on vengeance. If, now and then, some somber thoughts pictured themselves on her face, they only showed the faculty which some women have of burying the most passionate sentiments in their souls, and the dissimulation which allows them to smile graciously while they calculate

a victim's doom. She remained alone, studying how she could get the marquis alive into her hands. For the first time she had passed a portion of her life as she could have wished; but nothing remained with her of this episode but one feeling—that of thirst for vengeance, vengeance vast and complete. This was her sole thought, her single passion. Francine's words and attentions found her dumb. She seemed to be asleep with her eyes open, and the whole long day passed without her making sign, by a single gesture or action, of that outward life which reveals our thoughts. She remained stretched on an ottoman which she had constructed out of chairs and pillows. Only at night-time did she let fall, carelessly, the following words, looking at Francine as she spoke:

"Child, I learned yesterday that one may live for nothing but love; and to-day I learn that one may die for nothing but vengeance. Yes! to find him wherever he may be, to meet him once more, to seduce him and make him mine, I would give my life! But if in the course of a few days I do not find, stretched at my feet in abject humility, this man who has scorned me—if I do not make him my slave—I shall be less than nothing—I shall be no more a woman—I shall be no more myself!"

The house which Corentin had suggested to Mademoiselle de Verneuil gave him opportunity enough to consult the girl's inborn taste for luxury and elegance. He got together everything which he knew ought to please her, with the eagerness of a lover toward his mistress, or better still, with the obsequiousness of a man of importance who is anxious to ingratiate himself with some inferior of whom he has need. Next day he came to invite Mademoiselle de Verneuil to take up her quarters in these improvised lodgings.

Although she did little or nothing but change her uncomfortable ottoman for a sofa of antique pattern which Corentin had managed to discover for her, the fanciful Parisian took possession of the house as though it had been her own property. She showed at once a royal indifference for everything, and a sudden caprice for quite insignificant objects of furniture, which she at once appropriated as if they had been old favorites; traits common enough, but still not to be rejected in painting exceptional characters. She seemed as though she had already been familiar with this abode in dreams, and she subsisted on hatred there as she might have subsisted in the same place on love.

"At any rate," said she to herself, "I have not excited in him a feeling of the pity which is insulting and mortal. I do not owe him my life. Oh! first, sole, and last love of mine, what an ending is yours!" Then she made a spring on the startled Francine. "Are you in love? Yes! yes! I remember that you are. Ah! it is lucky for me that I have beside me a woman who can enter into my feelings. Well, my poor Francine, does not man seem to you a horrible creature? Eh? He said he loved me, and he could not stand the feeblest tests. Why, if the whole world had repulsed him, *my* heart should have been his refuge; if the universe had accused him, *I* would have taken his part. Once upon a time I saw the world before me full of beings who went and came, all of them indifferent to me; it was melancholy, but not odious. Now, what is the world without him? Shall he live without me to be near him, to see him, to speak to him, to feel him, to hold him—to hold him fast? Rather will I butcher him myself as he sleeps!"

Francine gazed at her in horror and silence for a minute. "Kill the man whom one loves?" she said in a low voice.

"Yes, when he loves no longer!"

But after this terrible speech she hid her face in her hands, sat down, and was silent.

On the next day a man presented himself abruptly before her without being announced. His countenance was stern. It was Hulot, and Corentin accompanied him. She raised her eyes, and shuddered.

"Have you come," she said, "to de-

mand account of your friends? They are dead!"

"I know it," answered Hulot; "but it was not in the Republic's service."

"It was for my sake, and by my fault," she replied. "You are about to speak to me of the country. Does the country restore life to those who die for her? Does she even avenge them? I shall avenge these!" she cried. The mournful image of the catastrophe of which she had been victim had suddenly risen before her, and the gracious creature in whose eyes modesty was the first artifice of woman strode like a maniac with convulsive step toward the astonished commandant.

"In return for these massacred soldiers I will bring to the ax of your scaffolds a head worth thousands of heads!" she said. "Women are not often warriors; but old as you are, you may learn some tricks of war in my school. I will hand over to your bayonets his ancestors and himself, his future and his past. As I was kind and true to him, so now I will be treacherous and false. Yes, commandant, I will lure this young noble into my embraces, and he shall quit them only to take his death journey. I will take care never to have a rival. The wretch has pronounced his own sentence, 'A day without a morrow!' We shall both be avenged—your Republic and I. Your Republic!" she continued, in a voice whose strange variations of tone alarmed Hulot. "But shall the rebel die for having borne arms against his country? Shall France steal my vengeance from me? Nay; how small a thing is life! One death atones for only one crime. Yet, if he has but one life to give, I shall have some hours in which to show him that he loses more than life. Above all, commandant (for you will have the killing of him)," and she heaved a sigh, "take care that nothing betrays my treason, that he dies sure of my fidelity; that is all I ask of you. Let him see nothing but me—me and my endearments!"

She held her peace; but, flushed as was her face, Hulot and Corentin could see that wrath and fury had not entirely extinguished modesty. Marie shuddered violently as she spoke the last words; they seemed to echo in her ears as if she could not believe that she had uttered them; and she gave a naive start, with the involuntary gesture of a woman whose veil drops.

"But you had him in your hands!" said Corentin.

"It is very likely," said she bitterly.

"Why did you stop me when I had got him?" asked Hulot.

"Eh, commandant? We did not know that it would prove to be he."

Suddenly the excited woman, who was pacing the room hastily, and flinging flaming glances at the spectators of the storm, became calm.

"I had forgotten myself," she said, in a masculine tone. "What is the good of talking? We must go and find him."

"Go and find him!" said Hulot. "Take care, my dear child, to do nothing of the kind. We are not masters of the country districts, and if you venture out of the town, you will be killed or taken before you have gone a hundred yards."

"Those who are eager for vengeance take no count of danger," she said, disdainfully dismissing from her presence the two men, whose sight struck her with shame.

"What a woman!" said Hulot, as he went out with Corentin. "What a notion it was of those police fellows in Paris! But she will never give him up to us," he added, shaking his head.

"Oh, yes, she will," replied Corentin.

"Don't you see that she loves him?" rejoined Hulot.

"That is exactly the reason. Besides," said Corentin, fixing his eyes on the astonished commandant, "I am here to prevent her making a fool of herself; for in my opinion, comrade, there is no such thing as love worth three hundred thousand francs."

When this diplomatist, who did not lie abroad, left the soldier, Hulot gazed after him, and as soon as he heard the noise of his step no longer, he sighed and said to himself:

"Then it *is* sometimes a lucky thing

to be only a fool like me?—God's thunder! If I meet the Gars we will fight it out hand to hand, or my name is not Hulot; for if that fox there brought him before me as judge, now that they have set up courts-martial, I should think my conscience in as sorry a case as the shirt of a recruit who is going through his baptism of fire!"

The massacre at the Vivetière, and his own eagerness to avenge his two friends, had been as influential in making Hulot resume command of his demi-brigade as the answer in which a new minister, Berthier, had assured him that his resignation could not be accepted under the circumstances. With the ministerial dispatch there had come a confidential note, in which, without informing him fully of Mademoiselle de Verneuil's mission, the minister wrote that the incident, which lay quite outside warlike operations, need have no obstructive effect on them. "The share of the military leaders in this matter should be limited," said he, "to giving the honorable citizeness such assistance as opportunity afforded." Therefore, as it was reported to him that the Chouan movements indicated a concentration of their forces on Fougères, Hulot had secretly brought up, by forced marches, two battalions of his demi-brigade to this important place. The danger his country ran, his hatred of aristocracy, whose partisans were threatening a great extent of ground, and his private friendship, had combined to restore to the old soldier the fire of his youth.

"And this is the life I longed to lead!" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, when she found herself alone with Francine. "Be the hours as swift as they may, they are to *me* as centuries in thought."

Suddenly she caught Francine's hand, and in a tone like that of the robin which first gives tongue after a storm, slowly uttered these words: "I cannot help it, child; I see always before me those charming lips, that short and gently upturned chin, those eyes full of fire. I hear the 'hie-up' of the postilion. In short, I dream; and why, when I wake, is my hatred so strong?"

She drew a long sigh, rose, and then for the first time bent her eyes on the country which was being delivered over to civil war by the cruel nobleman whom, without allies, she designed to attack. Enticed by the landscape, she went forth to breathe the open air more freely, and if her road was chosen by chance, it must certainly have been by that black magic of our souls which makes us ground our hopes on the absurd that she was led to the public walks of the town. The thoughts conceived under the influence of this charm not seldom come true; but the foresight is then set down to the power which men call presentiment—a power unexplained but real, which the passions find always at their service, like a flatterer who, amid his falsehoods, sometimes speaks the truth.

III.

A DAY WITHOUT A MORROW.

As the concluding events of this history had much to do with the disposition of the places in which they occurred, it is indispensable to describe these places minutely; for otherwise the catastrophe would be hard to comprehend.

The town of Fougères is partly seated on a schistous rock, which might be thought to have fallen forward from the hills inclosing the great valley of the Couësnon to the west, and called by different names in different places. In this direction the town is separated from these hills by a gorge, at the bottom of which runs a small stream called the Nancon; the eastward side of the rock looks toward the same landscape which is enjoyed from the summit of the Pilgrim; and the western commands no view but the winding valley of the Nancon. But there is a spot whence it is possible to take in a segment of the circle made by the great valley, as well as the agreeable windings of the small one which debouches into it. This spot, which was chosen by the inhabitants for a prome-

nade, and to which Mademoiselle de Verneuil was making her way, was the precise stage on which the drama begun at the Vivetière was to work itself out; and so, picturesque as the other quarters of Fougères may be, attention must be exclusively devoted to the details of the scene which discovers itself from the upper part of the promenade.

In order to give an idea of the appearance which the rock of Fougères has when viewed from this side, we may compare it to one of those huge towers round which Saracen architects have wound, tier above tier, wide balconies connected with others by spiral staircases. The rock culminates in a Gothic church, whose steeple, smaller spirelets, and buttresses, almost exactly complete the sugar-loaf shape. Before the gate of this church, which is dedicated to Saint Léonard, there is a small, irregularly shaped square, the earth of which is held up by a wall thrown into the form of a balustrade, and communicating by a flight of steps with the public walks. This esplanade runs round the rock like a second cornice, some fathoms below the Square of Saint Léonard, and affords a wide, tree-planted space, which abuts on the fortifications of the town. Next, some score of yards below the walls and rocks which support this terrace itself, due partly to the chance lie of the schist, and partly to patient industry, there is a winding road called the Queen's Staircase, wrought in the rock, and leading to a bridge built over the Nancon by Anne of Brittany. Last of all, under this road, which holds the place of a third cornice, there are gardens descending in terraces to the river bank, and resembling the tiers of a stage loaded with flowers.

Parallel to the promenade, certain lofty rocks, which take the name of the suburb whence they rise, and are called the hills of Saint Sulpice, stretch along the river and sink in a gentle slope toward the great valley, wherein they curve sharply toward the north. These rocks, steep, barren, and bare, seem almost to touch the schists of the promenade; in some places they come within gunshot of them, and they protect from the northerly winds a narrow valley some hundred fathoms deep, where the Nancon, split into three arms, waters a meadow studded with buildings and pleasantly wooded.

Toward the south, at the spot where the town, properly so called, ends and the Faubourg Saint Léonard begins, the rock of Fougères makes a bend, grows less scarped, diminishes in height, and winds into the great valley, following the course of the river, which it thus pushes close to the hills of Saint Sulpice, and making a narrow pass, whence the water escapes in two channels and empties itself into the Couësnon. This picturesque group of rocky heights is called the Nid-aux-Crocs; the glen which it forms is named the Valley of Gibarry, and its fat meadows supply a great part of the butter known to epicures under the name of Prévalaye butter.

At the spot where the promenade abuts on the fortifications there rises a tower called the Papegaut's Tower, and on the other side of this square building (on the summit of which is the house where Mademoiselle de Verneuil was lodged), there rises sometimes a stretch of wall, sometimes the rock itself, when it happens to present a sheer face; and the part of the town which is seated on this impregnable and lofty pedestal makes, as it were, a huge half-moon, at the end of which the rocks bend and sweep away, to give passage to the Nançon. There lies the gate of Saint Sulpice, leading to the faubourg of the same name. Then, on a granite tor commanding three valleys where many roads meet, rise the ancient crenelated towers of the feudal castle of Fougères, one of the hugest of the buildings erected by the dukes of Brittany, with walls fifteen fathoms high and fifteen feet thick. To the east it is defended by a pond, whence issues the Nancon to fill the moats and turn the mills between the drawbridge of the fortress and the Porte Saint Sulpice; to the west it is protected by the scarped masses of granite on which it rests.

Thus from the walks to this splendid relic of the Middle Ages, swathed in its

cloak of ivy and decked out with towers square or round, in each of which a whole regiment could be lodged, the castle, the town, and the rock on which it is built, all protected by straight curtains of wall or scarps of rock dressed sheer, make a huge horseshoe of precipices, on the face of which, time aiding them, the Bretons have wrought some narrow paths. Here and there bowlders project like ornaments; elsewhere water drips from cracks out of which issue stunted trees. Further off, slabs of granite, at a less sharp angle than the others, support grass which attracts the goats. And everywhere the briars, springing from moist crevices, festoon the black and rugged surface with rosy garlands. At the end of what looks like a huge funnel the little stream winds in its meadow of perpetual greenery, softly disposed like a carpet.

At the foot of the castle, and amid some knolls of granite, rises the church dedicated to Saint Sulpice, which gives its name to the suburb on the other side of the Nançon. This suburb, lying, as it were, at the foot of an abyss, with its pointed steeple far less in height than the rocks, which seem about to fall on the church itself, and its surrounding hamlet, are picturesquely watered by some affluents of the Nancon, shaded by trees and adorned with gardens. These cut irregularly into the half-moon made by the walks, the town, and the castle, and produce by their details a graceful contrast to the solemn air of the amphitheater which they front. Finally, the whole of Fougères, with its suburbs and churches, with the hills of Saint Sulpice themselves, is framed in by the heights of Rillé, which form part of the general fringe of the great valley of the Couësnon.

Such are the most prominent features of this natural panorama, whose main character is that of savage wildness, softened here and there by smiling passages, by a happy mixture of the most imposing works of man with the freaks of a soil tormented by unlooked-for contrasts, and distinguished by an unexpectedness which produces surprise, astonishment, and almost confusion. In no part of France does the traveler see such contrasts, on such a scale of grandeur, as those which are offered by the great basin of the Couësnon and the valleys which lurk between the rocks of Fougères and the heights of Rillé. These are of the rare kind of beauties, where chance is triumphant, and which yet lack none of the harmonies of nature. Here are clear, limpid, running waters; mountains clothed with the luxuriant vegetation of the district; dark rocks and gay buildings; strongholds thrown up by nature, and granite towers built by man; all the tricks of light and shade, all the contrasts between different kinds of foliage, in which artists so much delight; groups of houses, where an active population swarms; and desert spaces, where the granite will not even tolerate the blanched mosses which are wont to cling to stone—in short, all the suggestions which can be asked of a landscape, grace and terror, poetry full of ever new magic, sublime spectacles, charming pastorals. Brittany is there in full flower.

The tower called the Papegaut's Tower, on which the house occupied by Mademoiselle de Verneuil stands, springs from the very bottom of the precipice and rises to the staircase which runs cornice-wise in front of Saint Léonard's Church. From this house, which is isolated on three sides, the eye takes in at once the great horseshoe, which starts from the tower itself, the winding glen of the Nançon, and Saint Léonard's Square. It forms part of a range of buildings, three centuries old, built of wood, and lying parallel to the north side of the church, with which they make a blind alley, opening on a sloping street which skirts the church and leads to the gate of Saint Léonard, toward which Mademoiselle de Verneuil was now descending.

Marie naturally did not think of going into the square in front of the church, below which she found herself, but bent her steps toward the walks. She had no sooner passed the little green gate in front of the guard, which was then established in Saint Léonard's gate tower, than her emotions were at once subdued to silence

by the splendor of the view. She first admired the great section of the Couësnon Valley, which her eyes took in from the top of the Pilgrim to the plateau over which passes the Vitré road. Then she rested them on the Nid-aux-Crocs and the windings of the Gibarry Glen, the crests of which were bathed by the misty light of the setting sun. She was almost startled at the depth of the Nancon Valley, whose tallest poplars scarcely reached the garden walks underneath the Queen's Staircase. One surprise after another opened before her as she went, until she reached a point whence she could perceive both the great valley across the Gibarry Glen and the charming landscape framed by the horseshoe of the town, by the rocks of Saint Sulpice, and by the heights of Rillé.

At this hour of the day the smoke from the houses in the suburb and the valleys made a kind of cloud in the air, which only allowed objects to be visible as if through a bluish canopy. The garish tints of day began to fade; the firmament became pearl-gray in color; the moon threw her mantle of light over the beautiful abyss, and the whole scene had a tendency to plunge the soul into reverie, and help it to call up beloved images. Of a sudden she lost all interest in the shingled roofs of the Faubourg Saint Sulpice, in the church, whose aspiring steeple is lost in the depths of the valley, in the hoary draperies of ivy and clematis that clothe the walls of the old fortress, across which the Nancon boils under the mill-wheels, in the whole landscape. The setting sun in vain flung gold dust and sheets of crimson on the pretty houses scattered about the rocks, by the waters, and in the meadows, for she remained gazing motionless at the cliffs of Saint Sulpice. The wild hope which had led her to the walks had miraculously come true. Across the *ajoncs* and the broom that grew on the opposite heights she thought she could distinguish, despite their goatskin garments, several of the guests at the Vivetière. The Gars, whose least movement stood out against the soft light of sunset, was particularly conspicuous. A few paces behind the principal group she saw her formidable foe, Madame de Gua. For an instant Mademoiselle de Verneuil thought she must be dreaming, but her rival's hate soon gave her proof that the dream was alive. Her rapt attention to the marquis's slightest gesture prevented her from observing that Madame du Gua was carefully taking aim at her with a long fowling-piece. Soon a gunshot woke the echoes of the mountain, and a bullet whistling close to Marie showed her her rival's skill.

"She leaves her card upon me!" said she to herself, with a smile.

At the same moment numerous cries of "Who goes there?" resounded from sentinel to sentinel, from the castle to the gate of Saint Léonard, and warned the Chouans of the watchfulness of the men of Fougères, inasmuch as the least vulnerable part of their ramparts was so well guarded.

"'Tis she; and 'tis he!" thought Marie. To go and seek the marquis, to follow him, to surprise him, were thoughts which came to her like flashes of lightning. "But I am unarmed!" she cried, and she remembered that at the time of leaving Paris she had put in one of her boxes an elegant dagger, which had once been worn by a sultana, and with which she chose to provide herself on her way to the seat of war, like those pleasant folk who equip themselves with note-books to receive their impressions of travel. But she had then been less induced by the prospect of having blood to shed, than by the pleasure of wearing a pretty gemmed kandjar, and of playing with its blade, as clear as the glance of an eye. Three days earlier, when she had longed to kill herself in order to escape the horrible punishment which her rival designed for her, she had bitterly regretted having left this weapon in her box. She quickly went home, found the dagger, stuck it in her belt, drew a large shawl close round her shoulders and waist, wrapped her hair in a black lace mantilla, covered her head with a flapping Chouan hat belonging to one of the servants, and, with the presence of mind which passion

sometimes lends, took the marquis's glove which Marche-à-Terre had given her for a passport. Then, replying to Francine's alarms, "What would you have? I would go to seek *him* in hell!" she returned to the promenade.

The Gars was still on the same spot, but alone. Judging from the direction of his telescope, he appeared to be examining with a soldier's careful scrutiny the different crossings over the Nancon, the Queen's Staircase, and the road which, starting from the gate of Saint Sulpice, winds past the church and joins the highway under the castle guns. Mademoiselle de Verneuil slipped into the by-paths traced by the goats and their herds on the slopes of the promenade, reached the Queen's Staircase, arrived at the bottom of the cliff, crossed the Nancon, and traversed the suburb. Then guessing, like a bird in the desert, her way across the dangerous scarps of the Saint Sulpice crags, she soon gained a slippery path traced over granite blocks, and in spite of the broom, the prickly *ajoncs*, and the screes with which it bristled, she set herself to climb it with a degree of energy which it may be man never knows, but which woman, when hurried on by passion, may for a time possess. Night overtook her at the moment when, having reached the summit, she was looking about, by help of the pale moon's rays, for the road which the marquis must have taken. Persevering but fruitless explorations, and the silence which prevailed in the country, showed her that the Chouans and their chief had withdrawn. The exertion which passion had enabled her to make flagged with the hope which had inspired it. Finding herself alone, benighted and in the midst of a country unknown to her and beset by war, she began to reflect; and Hulot's warning and Madame du Gua's shot made her shudder with fear.

The stillness of night, so deep on the hills, allowed her to hear the smallest falling leaf even a great way off, and such slight noises kept vibrating in the air as though to enable her to take sad measure of the solitude and the silence. In the upper sky the wind blew fresh, and drove the clouds violently before it, producing waves of shadow and light, the effects of which increased her terror by giving a fantastic and hideous appearance to the most harmless objects. She turned her eyes to the houses of Fougères, whose homely lights burned like so many earthly stars; and suddenly she had a distinct view of the Papegaut's Tower. The distance which she must travel in order to return to it was nothing; but the road was a precipice. She had a good enough memory of the depths bordering the narrow path by which she had come to know that she was in more danger if she retraced her steps to Fougères than if she pursued her adventure. The thought occurred to her that the marquis's glove would free her night walk from all danger if the Chouans held the country; her only formidable foe was Madame du Gua. As she thought of her, Marie clutched her dagger, and tried to make her way toward a house whose roof she had seen by glimpses as she reached the crags of Saint Sulpice. But she made slow progress, for the majestic gloom which weighs on a being who is alone in the night in the midst of a wild district, where lofty mountain-tops bow their heads on all sides, like a meeting of giants, was new to her.

The rustle of her dress caught by the *ajoncs* made her start more than once, and more than once she hurried, slackening her pace again as she thought that her last hour was come. But before long the surroundings took a character to which the boldest men might have succumbed, and threw Mademoiselle de Verneuil into one of those panics which bear so hardly on the springs of life, that everything, strength or weakness, takes a touch of exaggeration in different individuals. At such times the feeblest show an extraordinary strength, and the strongest go mad with terror. Marie heard, at a short distance, curious noises, at once distinct and confused, just as the night was at once dark and clear. They seemed to show alarm and tumult, the ear straining itself in vain to comprehend them. They

rose from the bosom of the earth, which seemed shaken under the feet of a vast multitude of men marching. An interval of light allowed Mademoiselle de Verneuil to see, a few paces from her, a long file of ghastly figures, swaying like ears in a cornfield, and slipping along like ghosts, but she could only just see them, for the darkness fell again like a black curtain, and hid from her a terrible picture full of yellow, flashing eyes. She started briskly backward and ran to the top of a slope, so as to escape three of the terrible shapes who were coming toward her.

"Did you see *him?*" asked one.

"I felt a cold blast as *he* passed near me," answered a hoarse voice.

"For me, I breathed the damp air and smell of a graveyard," said the third.

"Was *he* white?" went on the first.

"Why," said the second, "did *he* alone of all those who fell at the Pilgrim come back?"

"Why," said the third, "why are those who belong to the Sacred Heart made favorites? For my part, I would rather die without confession than wander as *he* does, without eating or drinking, without blood in his veins or flesh on his bones."

"Ah!"

This exclamation, or rather cry of horror, burst from the group as one of the three Chouans pointed out the slender form and pale face of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who fled with terrifying speed, and without their hearing the least noise.

"He is there!" "He is here!" "Where is he?" "There!" "Here!" "He is gone!" "No!" "Yes!" "Do you see him?" The words echoed like the dull plash of waves on the shore.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil stepped boldly out in the direction of the house, and saw the indistinct forms of a multitude of persons who fled, as she approached, with signs of panic terror. It was as though she was carried along by an unknown power, whose influence was too much for her; and the lightness of her body, which seemed inexplicable, became a new subject of alarm to herself. These forms, which rose in masses as she came near, and as if they came from beneath the ground where they appeared to be stretched, uttered groans which were not in the least human.

At last she gained, with some difficulty, a ruined garden whose hedges and gates were broken through. She was stopped by a sentinel; but she showed him her glove, and, as the moonlight shone on her face, the rifle dropped from the Chouan's hands as he leveled it at Marie, and he uttered the same hoarse cry which was echoing all over the country. She could see a large range of buildings where some lights indicated inhabited rooms, and she reached the walls without finding any obstacle. Through the very first window to which she bent her steps, she saw Madame du Gua with the chiefs who had been assembled at the Vivetière. Losing her self-command, partly at the sight, partly through her sense of danger, she flung herself sharply back on a small opening guarded by thick iron bars, and distinguished, in a long vaulted apartment, the marquis, alone, melancholy, and close to her. The reflections of the fire, before which he was sitting in a clumsy chair, threw on his face ruddy flickers which gave the whole scene the character of a vision. Trembling, but otherwise motionless, the poor girl clung close to the bars, and in the deep silence which prevailed she hoped to hear him if he spoke. As she saw him dejected, discouraged, pale, she flattered herself that she was one of the causes of his sadness. And then her wrath changed to pity, her pity to affection; and she felt all of a sudden that what had brought her there was not merely vengeance. The marquis turned his head and stood aghast as he saw, as if in a cloud, the face of Mademoiselle de Verneuil; he let slip a gesture of scorn and impatience as he cried, "Must I, then, see this she-devil always, even when I am awake?"

The profound disdain which he had conceived for her drew from the poor girl a frenzied laugh, which made the young chief start; he darted to the casement, and Mademoiselle de Verneuil fled. She heard close behind her the steps of a man whom she thought to be Montauran; and

in order to escape him, nothing seemed to her an obstacle. She could have scaled walls and flown in the air, she could have taken the road to hell itself, in order to avoid reading once more in letters of fire the words "He despises you!" which were written on the man's forehead, and which her inner voice shouted to her, as she went, with trumpet sound. After going she knew not whither, she stopped, feeling a damp air penetrate her being. Frightened at the steps of more persons than one, and urged by fear, she ran down a staircase which led her to the bottom of a cellar. When she had reached the lowest step she hearkened, trying to distinguish the direction which her pursuers were taking; but though there was noise enough outside, she could hear the doleful groanings of a human voice, which added to her terror. A flash of light which came from the top of the stair made her fear that her persecutors had discovered her retreat; and her desire to escape them gave her new strength. She could not easily explain to herself, when shortly afterward she collected her thoughts, in what way she had been able to climb upon the dwarf wall where she had hidden herself. She did not even at first perceive the cramped position which the attitude of her body inflicted on her. But the cramp became unbearable before long; for she looked, under a vaulted arch, like a statue of the crouching Venus stuck by an amateur in too narrow a niche. The wall, which was pretty wide and built of granite, formed a partition between the stairway itself and a cellar from whence the groans came. Soon she saw a man whom she did not know, covered with goatskins, descending beneath her, and turning under the vaulting without giving any sign of hasty search.

Impatient to know whether any chance of safety would present itself, Mademoiselle de Verneuil anxiously waited for the light which the stranger carried to lighten the cellar, on whose floor she perceived a shapeless but living heap, which was making endeavors to reach a certain part of the wall by a violent succession of movements, resembling the irregular writhings of a carp stranded on the bank. A small torch of resin soon diffused its bluish and uncertain light in the cellar. Despite the romantic gloom which Mademoiselle de Verneuil's imagination shed upon the vaults as they re-echoed the sounds of dolorous supplication, she could not help perceiving the plain fact that she was in an underground kitchen, long disused. When the light was thrown upon the shapeless heap, it became a short and very fat man, whose limbs had all been carefully tied, but who seemed to have been left on the damp flags without further attention by those who had seized him. At sight of the stranger, who held the torch in one hand and a fagot in the other, the prisoner muttered a deep groan, which had so powerful an effect on Mademoiselle de Verneuil's feelings that she forgot her own terror, her despair, and the horrible cramped position of her limbs, which were stiffening from being doubled up, and did all she could to remain motionless. The Chouan threw his fagot into the fire-place after trying the strength of an old pot-hook and chain which hung down a tall iron fire-back, and lighted the wood with his torch. It was not without terror that Mademoiselle de Verneuil then recognized the cunning Pille-Miche, to whom her rival had delivered her up, and whose face, with the flame flickering on it, resembled the grotesque manikins that the Germans carve in box-wood. The wail which had escaped the captive brought a huge smile on his countenance, which was furrowed with wrinkles and tanned by the sun.

"You see," he said to the victim, "that Christians like us do not break their word as you do. The fire here will take the stiffness out of your legs, and your hands, and your tongue. But there! there! I can't see a dripping-pan to put under your feet: they are so plump, they might put the fire out. Your house must be very ill furnished that a man cannot find wherewithal to serve its master properly when he warms himself!"

The sufferer uttered a sharp yell, as if he hoped to make himself heard outside the vaults, and bring a deliverer.

"Oh! you can sing to your heart's content, Monsieur d'Orgemont! They have all gone to bed upstairs, and Marche-à-Terre is coming after me. He will shut the cellar door."

As he spoke, Pille-Miche sounded with his rifle-butt the chimney-piece, the flags that paved the kitchen floor, the walls, and the stoves, to try and find the hiding-place where the miser had put his gold. The search was conducted with such skill that D'Orgemont held his breath, as if he feared to have been betrayed by some frightened servant; for, though he had not made a confidant of any one, his ways of life might have given occasion to shrewd inferences. From time to time Pille-Miche turned sharply round to look at his victim, as if he were playing the children's game where they try to guess, by the unguarded expression of some one who has hidden a given object, whether they are "warm" or "cold." D'Orgemont pretended a certain terror as he saw the Chouan striking the stoves, which returned a hollow sound, and seemed to wish thus to amuse Pille-Miche's credulous greed for a time. At that moment three other Chouans, plunging into the staircase, made their appearance suddenly in the kitchen.

"Marie Lambrequin has come alive again!" said Marche-à-Terre, with a look and gesture which showed that all other matters of interest grew trifling beside such important news.

"I am not surprised at that," answered Pille-Miche. "He used to take the communion so often! You would have thought that *le bon Dieu* was his private property."

"Yes! But," said Mène-à-Bien, "that did him as much good as shoes do to a dead man. It seems he had not received absolution before the affair at the Pilgrim; he had played the fool with Goguelu's girl, and thus was caught in mortal sin. So Abbé Gudin says that he will have to wait for two months as a ghost before coming back really and truly. We all of us saw him pass before us — pale, and cold, and unsubstantial, and smelling of the graveyard."

"And his reverence says, that if the ghost can get hold of any one, he will carry him off as his mate," added the fourth Chouan. This last speaker's grotesque figure distracted Marche-à-Terre from the religious musings into which he had been plunged by a miracle, which, according to Abbé Gudin, fervent faith might repeat for the benefit of every pious defender of church and king.

"You see, Galope-Chopine," said he to the neophyte, with some gravity, "what are the consequences of the slightest shortcoming in the duties ordered by our holy religion. Saint Anne of Auray bids us have no mercy for the smallest faults among ourselves. Your cousin Pille-Miche has begged for you the place of overseer of Fougères; the Gars consents to intrust you with it, and you will be well paid. But you know what meal we bake traitor's cake of?"

"Yes, Master Marche-à-Terre."

"And you know why I say this to you? There are people who say that you are too fond of cider and of big penny-pieces. But you must not try to make pickings; you must stick to *us*, and us only."

"Saving your reverence, Master Marche-à-Terre, cider and penny-pieces are two good things, which do not hinder a man from saving his soul."

"If my cousin makes any mistake," said Pille-Miche, "it will only be through ignorance."

"No matter how a misfortune comes," cried Marche-à-Terre, in a voice which made the vault quiver, "I shall not miss *him*. You will be surety for him," he added, turning to Pille-Miche; "for if he does wrong I shall ask an account of it at the lining of your goatskins."

"But, ask your pardon, Master Marche-à-Terre," replied Galope-Chopine, "has it not happened to you more than once to believe that Anti-Ch*uins* are Ch*uins*?"

"My friend," said Marche-à-Terre dryly, "don't make that mistake again, or I will sliver you like a turnip. As for the messengers of the Gars, they will have his glove; but since that business at the Vivetière the Grande-Garce puts a green ribbon in it."

Pille-Miche jogged his comrade's elbow sharply, pointing to D'Orgemont, who pretended to be asleep; but both Marche-à-Terre and Pille-Miche himself knew by experience that nobody had yet gone to sleep at their fireside. And though the last words to Galope-Chopine had been spoken in a low tone, since the victim might have understood them, the four Chouans all stared at him for a moment, and no doubt thought that fear had deprived him of the use of his senses. Suddenly, at a slight sign from Marche-à-Terre, Pille-Miche took off D'Orgemont's shoes and stockings, Mène-à-Bien and Galope-Chopine seized him round the body and carried him to the fire. Then Marche-à-Terre himself took one of the cords that had bound the fagot and tied the miser's feet to the pot-hook. These combined proceedings, and their incredible swiftness, made the victim utter cries which became heartrending when Pille-Miche brought the coals together under his legs.

"My friends! my good friends!" cried D'Orgemont; "you will hurt me! I am a Christian like yourselves!"

"You lie in your throat!" answered Marche-à-Terre. "Your brother denied God. As for you, you bought Juvigny Abbey. Abbé Gudin says that we need feel no scruple as to roasting renegades."

"But, brethren in God, I do not refuse to pay you."

"We gave you a fortnight. Two months have passed, and here is Galope-Chopine, who has not received a farthing."

"You received nothing, Galope-Chopine?" asked the miser despairingly.

"Nothing, Monsieur d'Orgemont," answered Galope-Chopine, alarmed.

The yells, which had changed into a continuous growl, like a man's death-rattle, began again with unheard-of violence, but the four Chouans, as much used to this spectacle as they were to seeing their dogs walk without shoes, gazed so coolly at D'Orgemont as he writhed and howled, that they looked like travelers waiting by an inn fire till the roast was done enough to eat.

"I am dying! I am dying!" said the victim, "and you will not get my money!"

Despite the energy of the yells, Pille-Miche noticed that the fire had not yet caught the skin; and they poked the coals very artistically, so as to make them blaze up a little, whereat D'Orgemont said in a broken voice:

"My friends! Unbind me. . . . What do you want? A hundred crowns? A thousand? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand? I offer two hundred crowns!"

The voice was so pitiful that Mademoiselle de Verneuil forgot her own danger and allowed an exclamation to escape her.

"Who spoke?" asked Marche-à-Terre.

The Chouans cast startled glances round them; for, brave as they were before the deadly mouths of guns, they could not stand a ghost. Pille-Miche alone listened with undistracted attention to the confession which increasing pain wrung from his victim.

"Five hundred crowns? . . . Yes! I will give them!" said the miser.

"Bah! Where are they?" observed Pille-Miche calmly.

"What? They are under the first apple-tree. . . . Holy Virgin! At the end of the garden—on the left. . . . You are brigands! robbers! Ah! I am dying. . . . There are ten thousand francs there!"

"I won't have francs," said Marche-à-Terre; "they must be livres. The Republic's crowns have heathen figures on them which will never pass."

"They are in livres, in good louis d'or. Untie me! untie me! You know where my life is—that is to say, my treasure."

The four Chouans looked at each other, considering which of them could be trusted to go and unearth the money. But by this time their cannibal barbarity had so horrified Mademoiselle de Verneuil, that, without knowing whether or no the part which her pale face marked out for her would suffice to preserve her from danger, she boldly cried in a deep-toned voice: "Do you not fear the wrath of God? Untie him, savages!"

The Chouans raised their heads, saw in

the air eyes which flashed like two stars and fled in terror. Mademoiselle de Verneuil jumped down into the kitchen, flew to D'Orgemont, pulled him so sharply from the fire that the fagot cords gave way, and then, drawing her dagger, cut the bonds with which he was bound. When the miser stood up, a free man, the first expression on his face was a laugh—one of pain, but still sardonic. "Go to the apple-tree! Go, brigands!" he said. "Aha! I have outwitted them twice. They shall not catch me a third time!"

At the same moment a woman's voice sounded without. "A ghost?" cried Madame du Gua. "Fools! 'Tis *she!* A thousand crowns to him who brings me the harlot's head!"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil turned pale, but the miser smiled, took her hand, drew her under the chimney-mantel, and prevented her from leaving any trace of her passage by leading her so as not to disturb the fire, which filled but a small space. He touched a spring, the iron fire-back rose, and when their common foes re-entered the cellar, the heavy door of the hiding-place had already noiselessly closed. Then the Parisian girl understood the carp-like wrigglings which she had seen the luckless banker make.

"There, madame!" cried Marche-à-Terre. "The ghost has taken the Blue for his mate!"

The alarm must have been great, for so deep a silence followed these words that D'Orgemont and his fair companion heard the Chouans whispering "*Ava Sancta Anna Auriaca gratia plena, Dominus tecum,*" etc.

"The fools are praying!" cried D'Orgemont.

"Are you not afraid," said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, interrupting her companion, "of discovering our—"

A laugh from the old miser dissipated her fears. "The plate is bedded in a slab of granite ten inches thick. We can hear them, and they cannot hear us."

Then taking his liberatress's hand gently, he led her toward a crack whence came puffs of fresh air; and she understood that the opening had been worked in the chimney.

"Ah!" went on D'Orgemont, "the devil! My legs smart a little. That 'Filly of Charette,' as they call her at Nantes, is not fool enough to contradict her faithful followers; she knows well enough that if they were less brutishly ignorant, they would not fight against their own interests. There she is, praying too! It must be good to see her saying her Ave to Saint Anne of Auray! She had much better rob a coach so as to pay me back the four thousand francs she owes me. With costs and interest it comes to a good four thousand seven hundred and eighty, besides centimes."

Their prayer finished, the Chouans rose and went out.

But old D'Orgemont clutched Mademoiselle de Verneuil's hand, to warn her that there was still danger.

"No, madame!" cried Pille-Miche, after some minutes' silence, "you may stay there ten years. They will not come back!"

"But she has not gone out; she must be here," said Charette's Filly, obstinately.

"No, madame, no! they have flown through the walls. Did not the devil carry off a priest who had taken the oath in that very place before us?"

"What, Pille-Miche! do not you, who are as much of a miser as he is, see that the old skinflint might very well have spent some thousands of livres on making a recess with a secret entrance in the foundations of these vaults?"

The miser and the young girl heard Pille-Miche give a great laugh.

"Right! very right!" said he.

"Stay here!" said Madame du Gua; "wait for them when they go out. For one gunshot I will give you all you can find in our usurer's treasury. If you wish me to forgive you for having sold the girl when I told you to kill her, obey me!"

"Usurer!" said old D'Orgemont; "and yet I charged her no more than nine per cent. 'Tis true that I had a mortgage as security. But there! you see how grateful she is. Come, madame,

if God punishes us for doing ill, the devil is there to punish us for doing good; and man, placed between the two without knowledge of futurity, has always given me the idea of a problem of proportion in which x is an undiscoverable quantity."

He heaved a hollow sigh which was a characteristic of his, the air which passed through his larynx seeming to encounter and strike on two old and slack fiddle-strings. But the noise which Pille-Miche and Madame du Gua made as they once more sounded the walls, the vaulted ceiling, and the pavement, seemed to reassure D'Orgemont, who seized his deliverer's hand to help her in climbing a narrow corkscrew staircase worked in the thickness of a granite wall. When they had climbed some score of steps the feeble glimmer of a lamp shone above their heads. The miser stopped, turned toward his companion, gazed at her face as he would have scrutinized, handled, and re-handled a bill which was risky to discount, and uttered once more his boding sigh.

"By placing you here," he said, "I have paid you back in full the service you did me. Therefore I do not see why I should give you—"

"Sir! leave me here. I ask nothing of you," she said.

Her last words, and perhaps the disdain which her beautiful face expressed, reassured the little old man, for he answered, sighing again:

"Ah! I have done too much already by bringing you here not to go on with it."

He helped Marie politely to climb some steps of rather puzzling arrangement, and ushered her, half with a good grace, half reluctantly, into a tiny closet, four feet square, lighted by a lamp which hung from the vaulting. It was easy to see that the miser had made all his arrangements for spending more than one day in this retreat if the events of the civil war forced him to do so.

"Do not go close to the wall, the white will come off," said D'Orgemont suddenly, and with considerable haste he thrust his hand between the young girl's shawl and the wall, which seemed to have just been re-whitened. But the old miser's gesture produced an effect quite contrary to that which he intended. Mademoiselle de Verneuil instantly looked straight before her, and saw in a corner a sort of erection, the shape of which drew from her a cry of terror, for she could divine that a human form had been plastered over and stood up there. D'Orgemont imposed silence on her with a terrifying look, but his little china-blue eyes showed as much alarm as his companion's.

"Silly girl! do you think I murdered him? 'Tis my brother," said he, with a melancholy variation on his usual sigh, "the first rector who took the oath. This was the only refuge where he was safe from the rage of the Chouans and of the other priests. That they should persecute a worthy man, so well conducted! He was my elder brother, and none but he had the patience to teach me decimal notation. Ah! he was a good priest, and a saving; he knew how to lay up! 'Tis four years since he died, of what disease I know not; but look you, these priests have a habit of kneeling from time to time to pray, and perhaps he could not accustom himself to standing here as I do. I bestowed him there; anywhere else they would have unearthed him. Some day I may be able to bury him in holy ground, as the poor man (who only took the oaths for fear) used to say."

A tear dropped from the little old man's dry eyes, and his red wig looked less ugly thenceforward to the young girl. She averted her eyes out of secret reverence for his sorrow; but in spite of his emotion, D'Orgemont repeated, "Don't go near the wall, you will—"

Nor did his eyes take themselves off those of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, as though he hoped thus to prevent her bestowing more particular attention on the side walls of the closet, where the air, half exhausted, gave scanty play to the lungs. Yet Marie succeeded in stealing a glance from the surveillance of her Argus; and from the odd bumps on the walls she came to the conclusion that the miser had built them up himself with bags of silver and gold. For a moment's space

D'Orgemont had plunged into a fantastic kind of ecstasy. The pain which his scorched legs gave him, and his alarm at perceiving a human being in the midst of his treasures, were legible in every wrinkle; but at the same time his dried-up eyes expressed by their unaccustomed luster the liberal passion which was caused in him by the dangerous vicinity of his deliveress, whose pink and white cheeks were a magnet to kisses, and whose velvety black eyes made the blood flow so hotly through his heart, that he knew not whether it presaged life or death.

"Are you married?" he asked her in a quivering voice.

"No!" she answered with a smile.

"I am worth something," he said, heaving his sigh, "though I am not as rich as they all say. A girl like you ought to like diamonds, jewels, equipages and gold!" he added with a scared look round him; "I have all that to give after my death; and if you liked—"

The old man's eye showed so much calculation, even in this fleeting moment of passion, that as she shook her head negatively, Mademoiselle de Verneuil could not help thinking that the miser's desire for her hand came chiefly from the wish to bury his secret in the heart of a second self.

"Money!" she said, throwing at D'Orgemont a sarcastic glance which at once vexed and pleased him, "money is nothing to me. You would be thrice as rich as you are if all the money I have refused were there."

"Don't touch the w—!"

"And yet nothing was asked of me in return but a kind glance," she added, with pride unbelievable.

"You were wrong; it was a very good bargain. Why, think—"

"Think *you*," interrupted Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "that I have just heard yonder the sound of a voice one accent of which is more precious to me than all your riches!"

"You do not know them—"

But before the miser could hinder her, Marie displaced with a finger touch a small colored print of Louis XV. on horseback, and suddenly saw beneath her the marquis, who was busily loading a blunderbuss. The opening, hidden by the little panel on which the print was pasted, no doubt corresponded to some decoration on the ceiling of the neighboring chamber, which appeared to be the Royalist general's bedroom. D'Orgemont, with extreme precaution, pushed the old print back and looked sternly at the damsel.

"Speak not a word, if you love your life! You have cast your grapling," whispered he after a pause, "on a pretty vessel enough. Do you know that the Marquis of Montauran has a hundred thousand livres a year in leaseholds which have not yet been sold? Now, a consular decree which I have read in the Ille-et-Vilaine 'Sunday Times'* has just put a stop to sequestrations. Aha! You think the Gars there a prettier man, do you not? Your eyes flash like a pair of new louis d'or."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil's glances had gained animation as she heard the well-known voice sound once more. Since she had been in her present situation, standing, as it were, plunged in a gold and silver mine, the elasticity of her spirit, which had given way under the pressure of events, had renewed its vigor. She seemed to have taken a sinister resolve, and to see her way to put it in execution.

"There is no recovery from such scorn as this," she was saying to herself, "and if it is written that he shall no more love me, I will kill him! no other woman shall have him!"

"No, abbé! no," cried the young chief, whose voice now reached them; "it must be so."

"My lord marquis," objected Abbé Gudin, in a haughty tone, "you will scandalize all Brittany if you give this ball at Saint James. Preachers, and not dancers, are wanted to put our villages in motion. You must get fusees, not fiddles."

"Abbé, you are clever enough to know

* In original "*Primidi* de l'Ille-et-Vilaine," *Primidi* being the first day in each *decade* of that Republican calender which was one of the oddest recorded childishnesses of democracy.

that without a general assembly of our party, I cannot find out what I can undertake with them. No kind of espionage (which, by the way, I hate) seems to me more convenient for the examination of their countenances, and the discovery of their minds, than a dinner. We will make them talk, glass in hand."

Marie started as she heard the words, for she conceived the idea of going to this ball and avenging herself there.

"Do you think I am a fool that you preach to me against dancing?" went on Montauran. "Would you not yourself figure in a chaconne with all the good will in the world to get re-established under your new name of Pères de la Foi? Can you be ignorant that Bretons go straight from the mass to the dance? Can you be ignorant again that Hyde de Neuville and D'Andigné had an interview five days ago with the First Consul on the question of restoring His Majesty Louis XVIII.? If I am getting ready now to try so rash a *coup de main*, my sole reason is that I may throw the weight of our hob-nailed shoes in the scale of this negotiation. Can you be ignorant that all the Vendéan chiefs, even Fontaine, talk of surrender? Ah! sir, it is clear that the princes have been deceived as to the state of France. The devotion of which people talk to them is official devotion. Only, abbé, if I have dipped my foot in blood, I will not plunge in it up to my waist without knowing what I am about. I have devoted myself to the king's service, and not to that of a parcel of hotheads, of men head over ears in debt like Rifoël, of *chauffeurs*, of—"

"Say at once, sir," interrupted the Abbé Gudin, "of abbés who take tithes on the highway to maintain the war!"

"Why should I *not* say it?" answered the marquis sharply; "I will say more: the heroic age of La Vendée is past!"

"My lord marquis, we shall be able to do miracles without you."

"Yes! miracles like Marie Lambrequin's," said the marquis, laughing. "Come, abbé, do not let us quarrel. I know that you are not careful of your own skin, and can pick off a Blue as well as say an *oremus*. With God's help, I hope to make you take a part, miter on head, at the king's coronation."

These last words must have had a magical effect on the abbé, for the ring of a rifle was heard, and he cried, "My lord marquis! I have fifty cartridges in my pocket, and my life is the king's!"

"There is another of my debtors," said the miser to Mademoiselle de Verneuil; "I am not speaking of a wretched five or six hundred crowns that he owes me, but of a debt of blood which I hope will be paid some day. The accursed Jesuit can never have such bad luck as I wish him. He had sworn my brother's death, and he roused the whole country against him. And why? Because the poor fellow feared the new laws!"

Then, after putting his ear to a certain spot in the hiding-place, "The brigands are making off—the whole pack of them," said he; "they are going to do some other miracle. Let us hope that they will not try to bid me good-by as they did last time, by setting fire to the house."

Some half-hour later (during which time Mademoiselle de Verneuil and D'Orgemont gazed at each other as each might have gazed at a picture) the rough, coarse voice of Galope-Chopine cried, in a low tone, "There is no more danger, Monsieur d'Orgemont! but this time I earned my thirty crowns well!"

"My child," said the miser, "swear that you will shut your eyes."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil covered her eyelids with one of her hands; but to make surer still the old man blew out the lamp, took his deliveress by the hand, and helped her to take five or six steps in an awkward passage. At the end of a minute or two he gently removed her hand from her eyes, and she found herself in the room which Montauran had just quitted, and which was the miser's own.

"My dear child," said the old man, "you can go (do not stare round you like that). You are no doubt without money—here are ten crowns for you; there are clipped ones among them, but they will

pass. When you come out of the garden you will find a path leading to the town, or as they say now, to the district. But the Chouans are at Fougères, and it is unlikely that you will be able to enter there directly; so you may have need of a safe resting-place. Mark well what I am going to say to you, and only make use of it in the extremity of danger. You will see on the road which leads by the Gibarry Valley to the Nid-aux-Crocs, a farm where Long Cibot, called Galope-Chopine, dwells. Go in, say to his wife, 'Good-day, Bécanière!' and Barbette will hide you. If Galope-Chopine finds you out, he will take you for the ghost if it is night, or ten crowns will tame him if it is day. Good-by! we are quits. But if you chose," said he, pointing with a sweep of the hand to the fields surrounding his house, "all that should be yours!"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil cast a grateful glance on this odd being, and succeeded in drawing from him a sigh of unusually varied tone.

"Of course, you will pay me my ten crowns? (please observe that I say nothing about interest). You can pay them in to my credit with Master Patrat, the Fougères notary — who, if you chose, would draw up our marriage contract, my lovely treasure! Farewell!"

"Farewell!" said she, with a smile and a wave of her hand.

"If you want money," he cried after her, "I will lend it you at five per cent! yes, at five merely! did I say five?" but she had gone. "She seems a nice girl," added D'Orgemont; "still, I will change the trick of my chimney." Then he took a twelve-pound loaf and a ham, and went back to his hiding-place.

When Mademoiselle de Verneuil stepped out in the open country she felt as though new born; and the cool morning refreshed her face, which for some hours past seemed to her to have been stricken by a burning atmosphere. She tried to find the path which the miser had indicated, but since moonset the darkness had become so intense that she was obliged to go at a venture. Soon the fear of falling among the cliffs struck a chill to her heart and saved her life; for she made a sudden stop with the presentiment that another step would find the earth yawning beneath her. The cooler breeze which kissed her hair, the ripple of the waters, as well as her own instinct, gave her a hint that she had come to the end of the rocks of Saint Sulpice. She threw her arms round a tree, and waited for the dawn in a state of lively anxiety, for she heard a noise of weapons, of horses, and of human tongues. She felt thankful to the night which protected her from the danger of falling into the hands of the Chouans if they really, as the miser had said, were surrounding Fougères.

Like bonfires suddenly kindled by night, as a signal of liberty, some gleams of faint purple ran along the mountain-tops, the lower slopes retaining a bluish tinge in contrast with the dewy clouds floating over the valleys. Soon a crimson disk rose slowly on the horizon; the skies gave answering light; the ups and downs of the landscape, the steeple of St. Léonard's, the rocks, the meadows, which had been buried in shadow, reappeared little by little, and the trees on the hilltops showed their outlines in the nascent blaze. Rising with a graceful bound, the sun shook himself free from his ribbons of flame-color, of ochre, and of sapphire. His lively light sketched harmonies of level lines from hill to hill, and flowed from vale to vale. The gloom fled, and day overwhelmed all nature. A sharp breeze shivered through the air; the birds sang; on all sides life awoke. But the girl had hardly had time to lower her gaze to the main body of this striking landscape when, by a phenomenon common enough in these well-watered countries, sheets of mist spread themselves, filling the valleys, climbing the tallest hills, and burying the fertile basin in a cloak, as of snow. And soon Mademoiselle de Verneuil could fancy that she saw before her one of those seas of ice wherewith the Alps are furnished. Then the cloudy air became billowy as the ocean, and sent up dense waves which, softly swinging to and fro, undulating and even whirling rapidly, dyed themselves with bright rosy hues

from the rays of the sun, with here and there clear patches like lakes of liquid silver. Suddenly the north wind, breathing on the phantasmagoria, blew the fog away, leaving a heavy dew on the turf.

Then Mademoiselle de Verneuil could see a huge brown mass installed on the rocks of Fougères. Seven or eight hundred armed Chouans were swarming in the Faubourg Saint Sulpice like ants in an ant-heap, and the precincts of the castle, where were posted three thousand men, who had come up as if by enchantment, were furiously attacked. The town, despite its grassy ramparts and its ancient, grizzled towers, might have succumbed in its sleep, if Hulot had not been on the watch. A battery, concealed on a height lying in the hollow of the ramparts, replied to the first fire of the Chouans by taking them in flank on the road leading to the castle, which was raked and swept clean by grape-shot. Then a company made a sortie from the Porte Saint Sulpice, took advantage of the Chouans' surprise, formed on the roadway, and began a murderous fire on them. The Chouans did not even attempt resistance when they saw the ramparts of the castle covered with soldiers, as if the scene-painter's art had suddenly drawn long blue lines round them, while the fire of the fortress protected that of the Republican sharp-shooters. However, another party of Chouans, having made themselves masters of the little valley of the Nancon, had climbed the rocky paths and reached the promenade, to which they mounted, the goatskins which covered it giving it the appearance of thatch browned by time. At the same moment heavy firing was heard in that part of the town which looks toward the valley of the Couësnon. It was clear that Fougères was completely surrounded and attacked on all sides. A conflagration which showed itself on the east face of the rock, gave evidence that the Chouans were burning the suburbs; but the showers of sparks which came from the shingled or broom-thatched roofs soon ceased, and columns of black smoke showed that the fire was going out.

Once more gray and white clouds hid the scene from Mad moiselle de Verneuil, but the wind soon blew away this powder-fog. The Republican commander had already changed the direction of his battery, so as successively to rake the Nancon Valley, the Queen's Staircase, and the rocks, as soon as he had seen from the top of the promenade the complete success of his earlier orders. Two guns placed by the guard-house of the Porte Saint Léonard mowed down the swarms of Chouans which had carried that position, while the Fougères National Guard, which had hastily mustered in the church square, put the finishing touch to the rout of the enemy. The fight did not last half an hour, and did not cost the Blues a hundred men. The Chouans, beaten crushingly, were already retiring in every direction under the orders of the Gars, whose bold stroke failed, though he knew it not, as a direct consequence of the affair at the Vivetière, which had brought Hulot so secretly back to Fougères. The guns had only come up that very night; for the mere news that ammunition was on its way would have been enough to make Montauran abandon an enterprise which was certain of defeat as soon as blown upon. Indeed, Hulot was as ardently desirous of giving the Gars a smart lesson, as the Gars could be of succeeding in his dash, so as to influence the decisions of the First Consul. At the first cannon-shot the marquis saw that it would be madness to go on, out of vanity, with a surprise which was already a failure. So, to avoid useless loss of his Chouans, he promptly sent half a dozen messengers with instructions to effect a retreat at once on all sides. The commandant, catching sight of his foe surrounded by numerous advisers, Madame du Gua among the number, tried to send them a volley on the rocks of Saint Sulpice. But the position had been too skillfully chosen for the young chief not to be out of danger. So Hulot suddenly changed his tactics, and became the attacker instead of the attacked. At the first movement which disclosed the marquis's intentions, the company posted under the castle walls

set to work to cut off the retreat, by seizing the upper passes into the Nancon Valley.

Despite her hatred, Mademoiselle de Verneuil could not help taking the side of the men whom her lover commanded; and she turned quickly toward the other end to see if it was free. But there she saw the Blues, who had no doubt gained the day on the other side of the town, returning from the Couësnon Valley by the Gibarry Glen, so as to seize the Nid-aux-Crocs and the part of the rocks of Saint Sulpice where lay the lower exit of the Nançon Valley. Thus the Chouans, shut up in the narrow meadow at the bottom of the gorge, seemed as if they must perish to the last man, so exact had been the foresight of the old Republican leader, and so skillfully had his measures been taken. But at these two spots the cannon which had served Hulot so well lost their efficacy, a deperate hand-to-hand struggle took place, and, Fougères once saved, the affair assumed the character of an engagement to which the Chouans were well used. Mademoiselle de Verneuil at once understood the presence of the masses of men she had seen about the country, the meeting of the chiefs at D'Orgemont's house, and all the events of the night; though she could not conceive how she had managed to escape so many dangers. The enterprise, prompted by despair, interested her in so lively a manner that she remained motionless, gazing at the animated pictures before her eyes. Soon the fight below the Saint Sulpice crags acquired a new interest for her. Seeing that the Blues had nearly mastered the Chouans, the marquis and his friends flew to their aid in the Nancon Valley. The foot of the rocks was covered by a multitude of knots of furious men, where the game of life and death was played on ground and with arms much more favorable to the Goatskins.

Little by little the moving arena spread itself farther out, and the Chouans, scattering, gained the rocks by the help of the bushes which grew here and there. Mademoiselle de Verneuil was startled to see, almost too late, her enemies once more upon the heights, where they fought furiously to hold the dangerous paths which scaled them. As all the outlets of the high ground were held by one party or the other, she was afraid of finding herself surrounded, left the great tree behind which she had kept herself, and took to flight, hoping to profit by the old miser's directions. When she had hurried a long way on the slope of the heights of Saint Sulpice toward the great Couësnon Valley, she perceived a cow-shed some way off, and guessed that it belonged to the house of Galope-Chopine, who was likely to have left his wife alone during the fight. Encouraged by this guess, Mademoiselle de Verneuil hoped to be well received in the house, and to be able to pass some hours there, till it might be possible for her to return without risk to Fougères. To judge from appearances, Hulot was going to win. The Chouans fled so rapidly that she heard gunshots all round her, and the fear of being hit by some bullet made her quickly gain the cottage whose chimney served her as a landmark. The path she had followed ended at a kind of shed, the roof of which, thatched with broom, was supported by four large tree-trunks with the bark still on. A cobbed wall formed the end of the shed, in which were a cider press, a threshing-floor for buckwheat, and some plowing gear. She stopped and leaned against one of the posts, without making up her mind to cross the muddy swamp serving as courtyard to the house, which, like a true Parisian, she had taken for a cow-stall.

The cabin, protected from the north wind by an eminence which rose above the roof and against which it rested, was not without touches of poetry, for ash-suckers, briars, and the flowers of the rocks wreathed their garlands round it. A rustic stair wrought between the shed and the house allowed the inhabitants to go and breathe a purer air on the rock-top. At the left of the cottage the hill sloped sharply down, and laid open to view a series of fields, the nearest of which, no doubt, belonged to the farm.

These fields gave the effect of a pleasant woodland, divided by banks of earth which were planted with trees, and the nearest of which helped to surround the courtyard. The lane which led to the fields was closed by a huge tree-trunk, half rotten, a kind of Breton gateway, the name of which may serve later as text for a final digression on local color. Between the stair wrought in the schist and the lane, with the swamp in front and the hanging rock behind, some granite blocks, roughly hewn, and piled the one on the other, formed the four corner-stones of the house and held up the coarse bricks, the beams, and the pebbles of which the walls were built. Half the roof was thatched with broom instead of straw, and the other half was shingled with slate-shaped pieces of wood, giving promise of an interior divided in two parts; and in fact one, with a clumsy hurdle as a door, served as stall, while the owners of the house inhabited the other. Though the cabin owed to the neighborhood of the town some conveniences which were completely wanting a league or two further off, it showed well enough the unstable kind of life to which war and feudal customs had so sternly subjected the manners of the serfs, so that to this day many peasants in these parts give the term "abode" only to the chateau which their landlord inhabits.

After examining the place with astonishment which may easily be imagined, Mademoiselle de Verneuil noticed here and there in the courtyard mud some pieces of granite so arranged as to serve as stepping stones toward the house—a mode of access not devoid of danger. But as she heard the roll of the musketry drawing audibly nearer, she skipped from stone to stone, as if crossing a brook, to beg for shelter. The house was shut in by one of those doors which are in two separate pieces, the lower of solid and massive wood, while the upper is filled by a shutter serving as window. Many shops in the smaller French towns exhibit this kind of door, but much more ornamented, and provided in the lower part with an alarm-bell. The present specimen opened with a wooden latch worthy of the Golden Age, and the upper part was never shut except at night, for this was the only opening by which the light of day could enter the room. There was, indeed, a roughly-made casement; but its glass seemed to be composed of bottle ends, and the leaden latticing which held them occupied so much of the space that it seemed rather intended to keep light out than to let it in. When Mademoiselle de Verneuil made the door swing on its creaking hinges, whiffs of an appalling ammoniacal odor issued to meet her from the cottage, and she saw that the cattle had kicked through the interior partition. Thus the inside of the farm—for farm it was—did not match ill with the outside. Mademoiselle de Verneuil was asking herself whether it was possible that human beings could live in this deliberate state of filth, when a small, ragged boy, apparently about eight or nine years old, suddenly showed his fresh white and red face, plump cheeks, bright eyes, teeth like ivory, and fair hair falling in tresses on his half-naked shoulders. His limbs were full of vigor, and his air had that agreeable wonder and savage innocence which makes children's eyes look larger than nature. The boy was perfectly beautiful.

"Where is your mother?" said Marie, in a gentle voice, and stooping to kiss his eyes.

When he had had his kiss, the child slipped away from her like an eel, and disappeared behind a dunghill which lay between the path and the house on the rise of the hill. Indeed, Galope-Chopine, like many Breton farmers, was accustomed, by a system of cultivation which is characteristic of them, to put his manure in elevated situations, so that when it comes to be used the rain has deprived it of all its virtues. Left to her own devices in the dwelling for a moment or two, Marie was not long in taking stock of its contents. The room in which she waited for Barbette was the only one in the house; the most prominent and stately object in it was a huge chimney-piece, the mantel of which was formed of a slab of blue granite. The etymology of the word justified itself

by a rag of green serge edged with a pale-green ribbon, and cut out in rounds, hanging down the slab, in the midst of which stood a Virgin in colored plaster. On the pedestal of the statue Mademoiselle Verneuil read two verses of a sacred poem very popular in the country:

> "I am God's mother, *full of grace*,
> And the protectress of this place."

Behind the Virgin, a hideous picture, blotched with red and blue by way of coloring, presented Saint Labre. A bed, also of green serge, of the shape called tomb-shaped, a rough cradle, a wheel, some clumsy chairs, and a carved dresser, furnished with some utensils, completed, with a few exceptions, the movable property of Galope-Chopine. In front of the casement there was a long chestnut-wood table, with two benches in the same wood, to which such light as came through the glass gave the tint of old mahogany. An enormous cider cask, under whose spile Mademoiselle de Verneuil noticed some yellowish mud, the moisture of which was slowly rotting the floor, though it was composed of fragments of granite set in red clay, showed that the master of the house well deserved his Chouan nickname (Galope-Chopine, "tosspot"). Mademoiselle de Verneuil lifted her eyes as if to relieve them of this spectacle, and then it seemed to her that she saw all the bats in the world—so thick were the spiders' webs which hung from the ceiling. Two huge *pichets* full of cider stood on the long table. These vessels are a kind of jug of brown earth, the curious pattern of which is found in more than one district of France, and which a Parisian can imagine by fancying the jars in which epicures serve up Brittany butter, with the belly somewhat swollen, varnished here and there in patches and shaded over with dark yellow like certain shells. The jugs end in a sort of mouth not unlike that of a frog taking in air above water. Marie's attention had fixed on these pitchers, but the noise of the fighting, which sounded more and more distinct, urged her to seek a place more suitable for hiding without waiting for Barbette, when the woman suddenly appeared.

"Good day, Bécanière!" said she to her, suppressing an involuntary smile, as she saw a face which was not unlike the heads that architects place as ornaments over the keystones of window-arches.

"Aha! you come from D'Orgemont," answered Barbette, with no great air of alacrity.

"Where are you going to put me? for the Chouans are coming!"

"There!" said Barbette, equally astounded at the beauty and the strange dress of a creature whom she dared not take for one of her own sex. "There! in the priest's hole."

She led her to the head of her own bed and made her go into the alcove. But they were both startled by hearing a stranger plashing through the swamp. Barbette had scarcely time to draw a bed-curtain and wrap Marie up in it, when she found herself face to face with a fugitive Chouan.

"Old woman! where can one hide here? I am the Comte de Bauvan."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil shuddered as she recognized the voice of the guest whose words—few as they were, and secret as they had been kept from her—had brought about the disaster at the Vivetière.

"Alas! monseigneur, you see there is nothing of the kind here. The best I can do is to go out and keep watch. If the Blues come, I will warn you. If I stayed here, and they found me with you, they would burn my house."

And Barbette left the room; for she was not clever enough to adjust the claims of two mutual enemies who were, thanks to her husband's double part, equally entitled to the use of the hiding-place.

"I have two shots still to fire," said the count despairingly, "but they have got in front of me already. Never mind! I shall be much out of luck if, as they come back this way, they take a fancy to look under the bed!"

He put his gun gently down by the bed-post where Marie was standing wrapped

in the green serge, and he stooped to make sure that he could find room under the bed. He must infallibly have seen the feet of the concealed girl, but in this supreme moment she caught up his gun, leaped briskly into the open hut, and threatened the count, who burst out laughing as he recognized her; for in order to hide herself, Marie had discarded her great Chouan hat, and her hair fell in thick tufts from underneath a lace net.

"Don't laugh, count! you are my prisoner! If you make a single movement you shall know what an offended woman is capable of."

While the count and Marie were staring at each other with very different feelings, confused voices shouted from the rocks, "Save the Gars! Scatter yourselves! Save the Gars! Scatter yourselves!"

Barbette's voice rang over the tumult outside, and was heard in the cottage with very different sensations by the two foes; for she spoke less to her son than to them.

"Don't you see the Blues?" cried Barbette, sharply. "Are you coming here, wicked little brat! or shall I come to you? Do you want to be shot? Get away quickly!"

During these details, which took little time, a Blue jumped into the swamp. "Beau-Pied!" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil to him.

Beau-Pied ran in at her voice, and took rather better aim at the count than his deliveress had done.

"Aristocrat!" said the sly soldier, "don't stir, or I will demolish you like the Bastille in two jiffies!"

"Monsieur Beau-Pied," continued Mademoiselle de Verneuil in a coaxing tone, "you will answer to me for this prisoner. Do what you like with him; but you must get him safe and sound to Fougères for me."

"Enough, madame!"

"Is the road to Fougères clear now?"

"It is safe enough, unless the Chouans come alive again."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil armed herself gayly with the light fowling-piece, smiled sarcastically as she said to her prisoner, "Good-by, Monsieur le Comte; we meet again," and fled to the path, after putting on her great hat once more.

"I see," said the count bitterly, "a little too late, that one ought never to make jests on the honor of women who have none left."

"Aristocrat!" cried Beau-Pied harshly, "if you don't want me to send you to that *ci-devant* paradise of yours, say nothing against that fair lady!"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil returned to Fougères by the paths which connect the crags of Saint Sulpice and the Nid-aux-Crocs. When she reached this latter eminence and was hastening along the winding path which had been laid in the rough granite, she admired the beautiful little valley of the Nancon, just before so noisy, now perfectly quiet. From where she was the valley looked like a green lane. She entered the town by the gate of Saint Léonard, at which the little path ended. The townsmen—still alarmed by the fight, which, considering the gunshots heard afar off, seemed likely to last throughout the day—were awaiting the return of the National Guard in order to learn the extent of their losses. When the men of Fougères saw the girl in her strange costume, her hair disheveled, a gun in her hand, her shawl and gown whitened by contact with walls, soiled with mud and drenched with dew, their curiosity was all the more vividly excited in that the power, the beauty, and the eccentricity of the fair Parisian already formed their staple subject of conversation.

Francine, a prey to terrible anxiety, had sat up for her mistress the whole night, and when she saw her she was about to speak, but was silenced by a friendly gesture.

"I am not dead, child," said Marie. "Ah! when I left Paris I pined for exciting adventures—I have had them," added she, after a pause. But when Francine was about to go and order breakfast, remarking to her mistress that she must be in great need of it, Mademoiselle de Verneuil cried, "Oh, no! A bath!

a bath first! The toilet before all." And Francine was not a little surprised to hear her mistress ask for the most elegant and fashionable dresses which had been packed up. When she had finished her breakfast, Marie sat about dressing with all the elaborate care which a woman is wont to bestow on this all-important business when she has to show herself in the midst of a ball-room to the eyes of a beloved object. The maid could not understand her mistress's mocking gayety. It was not the joy of loving (for no woman can mistake that expression); it was concentrated spite, which boded ill. Marie arranged the curtains of the window, whence the eye fell on a magnificent panorama; then she drew the sofa near the fire-place, set it in a light favorable to her face, bade Francine get flowers so as to give the room a festal appearance, and when they were brought, superintended their disposal in the most effective manner. Then, after throwing a last glance of satisfaction on her apartment, she told Francine to send to the commandant and ask for her prisoner.

She stretched herself voluptuously on the couch, half for the sake of resting, half in order that she might assume an attitude of frail elegance, which in certain women has an irresistible fascination. Her air of languid softness, the provoking arrangement of her feet, the tips of which just peeped from the skirt of her gown, the *abandon* of her body, the bend of her neck, even the angle formed by her taper fingers, which hung from a cushion like the petals of a tuft of jasmine, made up, with her glances, a harmony of allurement. She burned some perfumes to give the air that soft influence which is so powerful on the human frame, and which often smoothes the way to conquests which women wish to gain without apparently inviting them. A few moments later the old soldier's heavy step echoed in the antechamber.

"Well! commandant, where is my captive?"

"I have just ordered out a picket of twelve men to shoot him as one taken arms in hand."

"What! you have settled the fate of my prisoner?" she said. "Listen, commandant! I do not think, if I may trust your face, that the death of a man in cold blood is a thing particularly delightful to you. Well, then, give me back my Chouan, and grant him a reprieve, for which I will be responsible. I assure you that this aristocrat has become indispensable to me, and that he will help in executing our projects. Besides, to shoot a man like this, who is playing at *Chouannerie*, would be as silly a thing as to send a volley at a balloon, which needs only a pin-prick to shrivel it up. For God's sake, leave cruelty to aristocrats; Republics should be generous. Would you not, if it had lain with you, have pardoned the victims of Quiberon and many others? There, let your twelve men go and make the rounds, and come and dine with me and my prisoner. There is only another hour of daylight, and you see," added she, with a smile, "if you are not quick, my toilet will miss its effect."

"But, mademoiselle—" said the commandant in surprise.

"Well, what? I know what you mean. Come, the count shall not escape you. Sooner or later the plump butterfly will burn his wings in your platoon fire."

The commandant shrugged his shoulders slightly, like a man who is forced to obey, willy-nilly, the wishes of a pretty woman, and came back in half an hour, followed by the Comte de Bauvan.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil pretended to be caught unawares by her guests, and showed some confusion at being seen by the count in so careless an attitude. But as she saw in the nobleman's eyes that her first attack had succeeded, she rose and devoted herself to her company with the perfection of grace and politeness. Nothing forced or studied in her posture, her smile, her movements, or her voice, betrayed a deliberate design. Everything was in harmony, and no exaggeration suggested that she was affecting the manners of a society in which she had not lived. When the Royalist and the Republican had taken their seats, she

bent a look of severity on the count. He knew women well enough to be aware that the insult of which he had been guilty was likely to be rewarded with sentence of death. But though he suspected as much, he preserved the air, neither gay nor sad, of a man who at any rate does not expect any such tragic ending. Soon it seemed to him absurd to fear death in the presence of a beautiful woman, and finally Marie's air of severity began to put notions in his head.

"Who knows," thought he to himself, "if a count's coronet, still to be had, may not please her better than a marquis's that is lost? Montauran is a dry stick enough, while I—" and he looked at himself with satisfaction. "Now, the least that I can gain is to save my head!"

But his diplomatic reflections did not do him much good. The liking which he had made up his mind to feign for Mademoiselle de Verneuil became a violent fancy which the dangerous girl took pleasure in stimulating.

"Count," she said, "you are my prisoner, and I have the right to dispose of you. Your execution will not take place without my consent, and, as it happens, I am too full of curiosity to let you be shot now."

"But suppose I were to be obstinately discreet?" answered he, merrily.

"With an honest woman perhaps you might; but with a 'wench!' Come, come! count, that would be impossible."

These words, full of bitter irony, were hissed out (as Sully says, speaking of the Duchess of Beaufort) from so sharp a beak that the nobleman in his surprise merely gazed at his ferocious adversary.

"Come," she went on mockingly, "not to contradict you, I will be, like these creatures, 'a kind girl.' To begin with, here is your gun;" and she handed him his weapon with a gesture of gentle sarcasm.

"On the faith of a gentleman, mademoiselle, you are acting—"

"Ah!" she said, breaking in, "I have had enough of the faith of gentlemen. That was the assurance on which I entered the Vivetière. Your chief swore to me that I and mine should be safe there!"

"Infamous!" cried Hulot, with frowning brows.

"It was Monsieur le Comte's fault," she said, pointing to him. "The Gars certainly meant quite sincerely to keep his word; but this gentleman threw on me some slander or other which confirmed all the tales that 'Charette's Filly' had been kind enough to imagine."

"Mademoiselle," said the count, disordered, "if my head were under the ax, I could swear that I said but the truth—"

"In saying what?"

"That you had been the—"

"Out with the word!—the mistress—"

"Of the Marquis (now Duke) of Lenoncourt, who is one of my friends," said the count.

"Now, I might let you go to execution," said Marie, unmoved in appearance by the deliberate accusation of the count, who sat stupefied at the real or feigned indifference which she showed toward the charge. But she went on, with a laugh, "Dismiss forever from your mind the sinister image of those pellets of lead! for you have no more offended me than this friend of yours whose—what is it?—fie on me!—you would have me to have been. Listen, count, have you not visited my father, the Duke de Verneuil? Eh?"

Thinking, no doubt, that the confidence which she was about to make was of too great importance for Hulot to be admitted to it, Mademoiselle de Verneuil beckoned the count to her and said some words in his ear. Monsieur de Bauvan let slip a half-uttered exclamation of surprise, and looked with a puzzled air at Marie, who suddenly completed the memory to which she had appealed by leaning against the chimney-piece in a child's attitude of innocent simplicity. The count dropped on one knee.

"Mademoiselle!" he cried, "I implore you to grant me pardon, however unworthy I may be of it."

"I have nothing to forgive," she said. "You are as far from the truth now in your repentance as you were in your insolent supposition at the Vivetière.

But these secrets are above your understanding. Know only, count," added she, gravely, "that the Duke de Verneuil's daughter has too much loftiness of soul not to take a lively interest in you."

"Even after an insult?" said the count, with a sort of regret.

"Are not some persons too highly placed to be within the reach of insult? Count, I am one of them."

And as she spoke these words the girl assumed an air of noble pride, which overawed her prisoner and made the whole comedy much less clear to Hulot. The commandant put his hand to his mustache as though to twist it up, and looked with a somewhat disturbed air at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who gave him to understand by a sign that she was making no change in her plan.

"Now," she said, after an interval, "let us talk. Francine, give us lights, child."

And she brought the conversation very cleverly round to that time which a few short years had made the *ancien régime*. She carried the count back to this period so well by the vivacity of her remarks and her sketches, she supplied him with so many occasions of showing his wit by the complaisant ingenuity with which she indulged him in repartees, that he ended by thinking to himself that he had never been more agreeable, and, his youth restored by the notion, he tried to communicate to this alluring person the good opinion which he had of himself. The malicious girl took delight in trying upon him all the devices of her coquetry, and was able to play the game all the more skillfully that for her it was a game, and nothing more. And so at one moment she let him believe that he had made a quick advance in her favor; at another, as though astonished at the liveliness of her feelings, she showed a coldness which charmed the count, and helped sensibly to increase his impromptu passion. She behaved exactly like an angler who from time to time pulls up his line to see if a fish has bitten. The poor count allowed himself to be caught by the innocent manner in which his deliveress had accepted a compliment or two, neatly turned enough. The emigration, the Republic, Brittany, the Chouans, were things a thousand miles away from his thoughts. Hulot sat bolt upright, motionless and solemn as the god Terminus. His want of breeding incapacitated him entirely for this style of conversation. He had, indeed, a shrewd suspicion that the two speakers must be very droll people, but his intelligence could soar no higher than the attempt to understand them so far as to be sure that they were not plotting against the Republic under cover of ambiguous language.

"Mademoiselle," said the count, "Montauran is well-born, well-bred, and a pretty fellow enough; but he is absolutely ignorant of gallantry. He is too young to have seen Versailles. His education has been a failure, and instead of playing mischievous tricks, he is a man to deal dagger-blows. He can love fiercely, but he will never acquire the perfect flower of manners by which Lauzun, Adhémar, Coigny, and so many others were distinguished. He does not possess the pleasing talent of saying to women those pretty nothings which after all suit them better than explosions of passion, whereof they are soon tired. Yes! though he be a man who has been fortunate enough with the sex, he has neither the ease nor the grace of the character."

"I did not fail to perceive it," answered Marie.

"Aha!" said the count to himself, "that tone and look meant that we shall soon be on the very best terms together; and, faith! in order to be hers, I will believe anything she wishes me to believe!"

Dinner being announced, he offered his hand to her. Mademoiselle de Verneuil did the honors of the meal with a politeness and tact which could only have been acquired by a court education and in the polished life of the court.

"You had better go," said she to Hulot, as they rose from the table; "you would frighten him; while if we are alone I shall soon find out what I want to know. He has come to the pitch where a man tells me everything he thinks, and sees everything through my eyes."

"And afterward?" asked the commandant, as if demanding the extradition of his prisoner.

"Oh! he must be free," said she, "free as air!"

"Yet he was caught with arms in his hands."

"No," said she, with one of the jesting sophistries which women love to oppose to peremptory reason, "I had disarmed him before. Count," she said to the nobleman, as she re-entered the room, "I have just begged your freedom; but nothing for nothing!" she added, with a smile and a sidelong motion of her head, as if putting questions to him.

"Ask me for anything, even my name and my honor!" he cried in his intoxication. "I lay all at your feet!" and he darted forward to grasp her hand, endeavoring to represent his desire as gratitude. But Mademoiselle de Verneuil was not a girl to mistake the two; and therefore, smiling all the while, so as to give some hope to this new lover, but stepping back a pace or two, she said, "Will you give me cause to repent my trust?"

"A girl's thoughts run faster than a woman's," he replied, laughing.

"A girl has more to lose than a woman."

"True; those who carry treasures should be mistrustful."

"Let us drop this talk," said she, "and speak seriously. You are going to give a ball at Saint James. I have been told that you have established there your stores, your arsenals, and the seat of your government. When is the ball?"

"To-morrow night."

"You will not be surprised, sir, that a slandered woman should wish, with a woman's obstinacy, to obtain a signal reparation for the insults which she has undergone in the presence of those who witnessed them. Therefore, I will go to your ball. I ask you to grant me your protection from the moment I appear there to the moment I leave. I will not have your word," said she, noticing that he was placing his hand on his heart. "I hate oaths; they are too like precautions. Simply tell me that you will undertake to hold my person scathless from all criminal or shameful attempt. Promise to redress the wrong you have done me by announcing that I am really the Duke de Verneuil's daughter, and by holding your tongue about all the ills I owed to a lack of paternal protection. We shall then be quits. What? Can a couple of hours' protection given to a lady at a ball be too heavy a ransom? Come! you are worth no more!" But she took all the bitterness out of her words with a smile.

"What do you ask, then, for my gun's ransom?" said the count with a laugh.

"Oh! more than for yourself."

"What?"

"Secrecy. Believe me, Bauvan, only women can detect women. I know that if you say a word I may be murdered on the road. Yesterday certain bullets gave me warning of the danger I have to run on the highway. That lady is as clever at the chase as she is deft at the toilet. No waiting-maid ever undressed me so quickly. For Heaven's sake!" she said, "take care that I have nothing of that kind to fear at the ball."

"You will be under my protection there!" said the count proudly. "But," he asked with some sadness, "are you going to Saint James for Montauran's sake?"

"You want to know more than I know myself!" she said with a laugh, adding, after a pause, "Now go! I will myself escort you out of the town; for you all wage war like mere savages here."

"Then, you care a little for me?" cried the count. "Ah, mademoiselle, allow me to hope that you will not be insensible to my friendship, for I suppose I must be content with that, must I not?" he added, with an air of coxcombry.

"Go away, you conjurer!" said she, with the cheerful expression of a woman who confesses something that compromises neither her dignity nor her secrets.

Then she put on a jacket and accompanied the count to the Nid-aux-Crocs. When she had come to the end of the path, she said to him, "Sir! observe the most absolute secrecy, even with the mar-

quis," and she placed her finger on her lips. The count, emboldened by her air of kindness, took her hand (which she let him take as though it were the greatest favor) and kissed it tenderly.

"Oh! mademoiselle," cried he, seeing himself out of all danger, "count on me in life and in death. Though the gratitude I owe you is almost equal to that which I owe my mother, it will be very difficult for me to feel toward you only respect."

He darted up the path, and when she had seen him gain the crags of Saint Sulpice, Marie nodded her head with a satisfied air, and whispered to herself, "The fat fellow has given me more than his life for his life. I could make him my creature at very small expense. Creature or creator, that is all the difference between one man and another!"

She did not finish her sentence, but cast a despairing glance to heaven, and slowly made her way back to the Porte Saint Léonard, where Hulot and Corentin were waiting for her.

"Two days more!" she cried, "and—" but she stopped, seeing that she and Hulot were not alone—"and he shall fall under your guns," she whispered to the commandant. He stepped back a pace, and gazed, with an air of satire not easy to describe, on the girl whose face and bearing showed not a touch of remorse. There is in women this admirable quality, that they never think out their most blameworthy actions. Feeling carries them along; they are natural even in their very dissembling, and in them alone crime can be found without accompanying baseness, for in most cases "they know not what they do."

"I am going to Saint James, to the ball given by the Chouans, and—"

"But," said Corentin, interrupting her, "it is five leagues off. Would you like me to go with you?"

"You are very busy," said she to him, "with a subject of which I never think—with yourself!"

The contempt which Marie showed for Corentin pleased Hulot particularly, and he made his grimace as she vanished toward Saint Léonard's. Corentin followed her with his eyes, showing in his countenance a silent consciousness of the fated superiority which, as he thought, he could exercise over this charming creature, by governing the passions on which he counted to make her one day his. When Mademoiselle de Verneuil got home she began eagerly to meditate on her ball-dresses. Francine, accustomed to obey without ever comprehending her mistress's objects, rummaged the band-boxes, and proposed a Greek costume—everything at that time obeyed the Greek influence. The dress which Marie settled upon would travel in a box easy to carry.

"Francine, my child, I am going to make a country excursion. Make up your mind whether you will stay here or come with me."

"Stay here!" cried Francine; "and who is to dress you?"

"Where did you put the glove which I gave you back this morning?"

"Here it is."

"Sew a green ribbon in it; and, above all, take money with you." But when she saw that Francine had in her hands newly coined pieces, she cried, "You have only to do that if you want to get us murdered! Send Jeremy to wake Corentin; but no—the wretch would follow us. Send to the commandant instead, to ask him, from me, for crowns of six francs."

Marie thought of everything with that woman's wit which takes in the smallest details. While Francine was finishing the preparations for her unintelligible departure, she set herself to attempt the imitation of the owl's hoot, and succeeded in counterfeiting Marche-à-Terre's signal so as to deceive anybody. As midnight struck she sallied from the Porte Saint Léonard, gained the little path on the Nid-aux-Crocs, and, followed by Francine, ventured across the valley of Gibarry, walking with a steady step, for she was inspired by that strong will which imparts to the gait and to the body an air of power. How to leave a ball-room without catching a cold is for women an important matter; but let them feel passion in their hearts, and their body becomes as

it were of bronze. It might have taken even a daring man a long time to resolve on the undertaking, yet it had scarcely showed its first aspect to Mademoiselle de Verneuil when its dangers became attractions for her.

"You are going without commending yourself to God!" said Francine, who had turned back to gaze at Saint Léonard's steeple.

The pious Breton girl halted, clasped her hands, and said an Ave to Saint Anne of Auray, begging her to bless the journey; while her mistress stood lost in thought, looking by turns at the simple attitude of her maid, who was praying fervently, and at the effects of the misty moonlight which, gliding through the carved work of the church, gave to the granite the lightness of filigree. The two travelers lost no time in reaching Galope-Chopine's hut; but light as was the sound of their steps, it woke one of the large dogs to whose fidelity the Bretons commit the guardianship of the plain wooden latch which shuts their doors. The dog ran up to the two strangers, and his bark became so threatening that they were obliged to cry for help and retrace their steps some way. But nothing stirred. Mademoiselle de Verneuil whistled the owl's hoot; at once the rusty door-hinges creaked sharply in answer, and Galope-Chopine, who had hastily risen, showed his somber face.

"I have need," said Marie, presenting Montauran's glove to the *surveillant* of Fougères, "to travel quickly to Saint James. The Count de Bauvan told me that you would act as my guide and protector thither. Therefore, my dear Galope-Chopine, get us two donkeys to ride, and be ready to bear us company. Time is precious, for if we do not reach Saint James before to-morrow evening, we shall see neither the Gars nor the ball."

Galope-Chopine took the glove with a puzzled air, turned it this way and that, and kindled a candle, made of resin, as thick as the little finger and of the color of gingerbread. These wares, imported into Brittany from the north of Europe, show, like everything that meets the eye in this strange country, ignorance of even the commonest commercial principles. After inspecting the green ribbon, and staring at Mademoiselle de Verneuil, after scratching his ear, after drinking a pitcher of cider himself and offering a glass of it to the fair lady, Galope-Chopine left her before the table, on the bench of polished chestnut-wood, and went to seek two donkeys. The deep blue light which the outlandish candle cast was not strong enough to master the fantastic play of the moonbeams that varied with dots of light the dark colorings of the floor and furniture of the smoky cabin. The little boy had raised his startled head, and just above his fair hair two cows showed, through the holes in the stable-wall, their pink muzzles and their great, flashing eyes. The big dog, whose countenance was not the least intelligent of the family group, appeared to be examining the two strangers with a curiosity equal to that of the child. A painter might have spent a long time in admiring the effects of this night-piece; but Marie, not anxious to enter into talk with Barbette, who was sitting up in bed like a specter, and began to open her eyes very wide as she recognized her visitor, went out to escape at once the pestiferous air of the hovel, and the questions which "La Bécanière" was likely to put to her. She climbed with agility the staircase up the rock which sheltered Galope-Chopine's hut, and admired the vast assembly of details in a landscape where the point of view changed with every step forward or backward, upward or downward.

At the moment the moonlight enveloped the valley of the Couësnon as with luminous fog, and sure enough a woman who carried slighted love in her heart must have relished the melancholy which this soft light produces in the soul by the fantastic shapes which it impresses on solid bodies, and the tints which it throws upon the waters. Then the silence was broken by the bray of the asses. Marie quickly descended to the Chouan's hut, and they set off at once. Galope-Chopine, who was armed with a double-barreled fowling-piece, wore a goatskin,

MADEMOISELLE DE VERNEUIL.
"I am horrid! I have the air of a statue of Liberty."

which gave him the appearance of Robinson Crusoe. His wrinkled and pimpled countenance was scarcely visible under the broad hat which the peasants still keep as a vestige of old time, feeling pride at having gained, in spite of their serfdom, the sometime decoration of lordly heads. This nocturnal procession, guarded by a guide whose dress, attitude, and general appearance had something patriarchal, resembled the scene of the Flight into Egypt, which we owe to the somber pencil of Rembrandt. Galope-Chopine avoided the highway with care, and guided the travelers through the vast labyrinth of the Breton cross-roads.

Then Mademoiselle de Verneuil began to understand the Chouan fashion of warfare. As she traversed these roads she could better appreciate the real condition of districts which, seen from above, had appeared to her so charming, but which must be penetrated in order to grasp their danger and their inextricable difficulty. Around each field the peasants have raised, time out of mind, an earthen wall, six feet high, of the form of a truncated pyramid, on the top whereof chestnut trees, oaks, and beeches grow. This wall, planted after such a fashion, is called a "hedge"—the Norman style of hedge—and the long branches of the trees which crown it, flung, as they almost always are, over the pathway, make a huge arbor overhead. The roadways, gloomily walled in by these clay banks or walls, have a strong resemblance to the fosse of a fortress, and when the granite, which in this country almost always crops up flush with the surface of the ground, does not compose a kind of uneven pavement, they become so impassable that the smallest cart cannot travel over them without the help of a pair of oxen or horses, small but generally stout. These roads are so constantly muddy that custom has established for foot passengers a path inside the field and along the hedge—a path called a *rote*, beginning and ending with each holding of land. In order to get from one field to another it is thus necessary to climb the hedge by means of several steps, which the rain often makes slippery enough.

But these were by no means the only obstacles which travelers had to overcome in these tortuous lanes. Each piece of land, besides being fortified in the manner described, has a regular entrance about ten feet wide, and crossed by what is called in the West an *échalier*. This is the trunk or a stout branch of a tree, one end of which, drilled through, fits, as it were, into a handle composed of another piece of shapeless wood serving as a pivot. The extreme butt-end of the *échalier* extends a little beyond the pivot, so as to be able to carry a heavy burden in the shape of a counter-weight, and to allow even a child to work this strange kind of country gate. The other end of it rests in a hole made on the inside of the hedge. Sometimes the peasants economize the counter-weight stone by letting the heavy end of the trunk or branch hang over. The style of the barrier is altered according to the fancy of each owner. It often consists of a single branch, the two ends of which are socketed into the hedge by earth; often also it looks like a square gate built up of several thin branches fixed at intervals like the rungs of a ladder set crosswise. This gate turns like the *échalier* itself, and its other end plays on a small wheel of solid wood. These hedges and gates give the ground the appearance of a huge chess-board, each field of which makes an inclosure completely isolated from the rest, walled in like a fortress, and like it possessing ramparts.

The gate, easy to defend, gives the assailant the least easy of all conquests; for the Breton peasant thinks that he fertilizes his fallows by allowing them to grow huge broom bushes—a shrub which finds such congenial treatment in this district that it soon grows to the height of a man. This notion—worthy of people who put their manure on the highest patch of their farmyards—keeps upon the soil, in one field out of every four, forests of broom, in the midst of which all manner of ambuscades can be ar-

ranged. And, to conclude, there is hardly a field where there are not some old cider-apple trees dropping their branches low over it and killing the crops which they cover. Thus, if the reader will remember how small the fields are where every hedge supports far ranging trees, whose greedy roots monopolize a fourth of the ground, he will have an idea of the agricultural arrangement and general appearance of the country which Mademoiselle de Verneuil was now traversing.

It is difficult to say whether anxiety to avoid disputes about title, or the custom, dear to laziness, of shutting in cattle without having to herd them, has most to do with the construction of these formidable inclosures, whose enduring obstacles make the country impenetrable, and forbid all war with large bodies of men. When the lay of the ground has been examined step by step, it is clear what must be the fated ill-success of a war between regular and irregular troops; for five hundred men might laugh at the army of a kingdom. In this was the whole secret of the Chouan war. And Mademoiselle de Verneuil at once understood the need which the Republic had of stifling disorder by means of police and diplomacy rather than by the useless use of military force. What could be done, indeed, against men clever enough to scorn the holding of towns, and make sure of holding the country, with its indestructible fortifications? How do aught but negotiate, when the whole strength of these blinded peasants lay in a skillful and enterprising chief? She admired the genius of the minister who had guessed in his study the secret of peace; she thought she could see the considerations working on men powerful enough to hold a whole empire under their glance, and whose deeds, criminal to the vulgar eye, are only the workings of a vast thought.

These awe-inspiring souls are divided, one knows not how, between the power of fate and destiny, and they possess a foresight the first evidence of which exalts them. The crowd looks for them among itself, then lifts its eyes and sees them soaring above it. This consideration appeared to justify and even to ennoble the thoughts of vengeance which Mademoiselle de Verneuil had formed; and in consequence her reflections and her hopes gave her energy enough to bear the unwonted fatigues of her journey. At the end of each property Galope-Chopine was obliged to make the two travelers dismount and to help them to climb the difficult stiles; while, when the *rotes* came to an end, they had to get into the saddle again and venture into the muddy lanes, which already gave tokens of the approach of winter. The joint action of the great trees, of the hollow ways, and of the field inclosures, kept up in the lower grounds a dampness which often wrapped the travelers as in a cloak of ice. After toilsome exertions they reached by sunrise the woods of Marignay, and the journey in the wide forest path then became less difficult. The vault of branches and the thickness of the tree-trunks sheltered the voyagers from the inclemency of the sky, and the manifold difficulties which they had at first to surmount disappeared.

They had scarcely journeyed a league across the wood when they heard afar off a confused murmur of voices and the sound of a bell, whose silvery tinkle was free from the monotonous tone given by cattle as they walk. As he went along, Galope-Chopine listened to this music with much attention, and soon a gust of wind brought to his ear a snatch of psalmody which seemed to produce a great effect on him. He at once drove the weary beasts into a path diverging from that which would lead the travelers to Saint James; and he turned a deaf ear to the representations of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, whose fears increased with the gloomy character of the landscape.

To right and left huge granite rocks, piled the one on the other, presented singular outlines, while between them enormous roots crawled, like great snakes, in search of distant nourishment for immemorial beeches. The two sides of the road resembled those subterranean grot-

toes which are famous for their stalactites. Vast festoons of ivy, among which the dark verdure of holly and of heath mingled with the greenish or whitish patches of moss, veiled the crags and the entrance of some deep caves. When the three travelers had gone some steps in a narrow path a most surprising spectacle presented itself to Mademoiselle de Verneuil's eyes, and explained to her Galope-Chopine's obstinacy.

A semi-circular basin, wholly composed of masses of granite, formed an amphitheater on whose irregular tiers tall black pines and yellowing chestnuts rose one above the other like a great circus, into which the wintry sun seemed rather to instill a pale coloring than to pour its light, and where autumn had already thrown the tawny carpet of its withered leaves on all sides. In the middle of this hall, which seemed to have had the deluge for its architect, there rose three enormous druidic stones, composing a vast altar, upon which was fastened an old church banner. Some hundred men knelt, bareheaded and fervently praying, in the inclosure, while a priest, assisted by two other ecclesiastics, was saying mass. The shabbiness of the sacred vestments, the thin voice of the priest, which scarcely murmured an echo through space, the devout congregation unanimous in sentiment, and prostrate before an altar devoid of pomp, the cross bare of ornament, the stern rusticity of the temple, the hour, the place—all gave to the scene the character of simplicity which distinguished the early ages of Christianity.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil was and remained struck with admiration. This mass, said in the heart of the woods; this worship, driven by persecution back to its own sources; this poetry of ancient times boldly contrasted with natural surroundings of fantastic strangeness; these Chouans at once armed and unarmed, cruel and devout, childlike and manly—the whole scene, in short, was unlike anything that she had before seen or imagined. She remembered well enough that in her childhood she had admired the pomp of the Roman Church, which appeals so cunningly to the senses; but she had never yet seen God alone, His cross on the altar, His altar on the bare ground, the autumn trees supporting the dome of heaven in place of the fretted moldings which crown the Gothic arches of cathedrals, the sun stealing with difficulty its ruddy rays and duller reflections upon the altar, the priest and the congregation, instead of the thousand hues flung by stained glass. Here men represented a fact, and not a system; here was prayer, and not formality. But human passions, whose momentary suppression gave the picture all its harmony, soon reappeared in this scene of mystery, and infused in it a powerful animation.

The gospel was drawing to a close as Mademoiselle de Verneuil came up. With no small alarm she recognized in the celebrant the Abbé Gudin, and hid herself quickly from his sight, availing herself of a huge fragment of granite for a hiding-place, into which she briskly drew Francine. But she tried in vain to tear Galope-Chopine from the place which he had chosen in order to share in the advantages of the ceremony. She entertained, however, hopes of being able to escape the danger which threatened her, when she noticed that the nature of the ground gave her the opportunity of withdrawing before the rest of the congregation. By the help of a wide crack in the rock she could see Abbé Gudin mounting a mass of granite which served him as pulpit. He began his sermon in these terms:

"*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!*"

At which words the whole congregation piously made the sign of the cross.

"My dear brethren," the abbé went on in a loud voice, "let us first pray for the dead—Jean Cochegrue, Nicolas Laferté, Joseph Brouet, François Parquoi, Sulpice Coupiau—all of this parish, who died of the wounds they received at the fight on the Pilgrim and at the siege of Fougères."

Then was recited the "De Profundis," according to custom, by the congregation and the priest antiphonally, and with a fervor which gave good augury of the success of the preaching. When this psalm for the dead was finished, Abbé Gudin

went on in a voice of ever-increasing strength, for the old Jesuit did not forget that energy of delivery was the most powerful of arguments to persuade his uncultivated hearers.

"Christians!" he said, "these champions of God have set you an example of your duty. Are you not ashamed of what they may be saying of you in Paradise? But for those blessed ones, who must have been received there with open arms by all the Saints, our Lord might believe that your parish is inhabited by followers of Mahound! Do you know, my gars, what they say of you in Brittany and at court? You do not know it, do you? Then, I will tell you; they say: 'What! the Blues have thrown down the altars; they have killed the rectors; they have murdered the king and the queen; they would fain take all the parishioners of Brittany to make Blues of them like themselves, and send them to fight far from their parishes, in distant lands, where men run the risk of dying without confession, and so going to hell for all eternity. And do the gars of Marignay, whose church they have burned, stay with their arms dangling by their sides?

"'Oh! oh! This Republic of the damned has sold the goods of God and the seigneurs by auction; it has shared the price among its Blues, and now, in order to feast on money as it has feasted on blood, it has just resolved to take three livres on each crown of six francs, just as it levies three men out of every six. And have not the gars of Marignay caught up their guns to drive the Blues out of Brittany? Aha! The door of Paradise shall be shut on them, and they shall never again be able to gain salvation.' That is what they are saying of you. So, Christian brethren, it is your salvation which is at stake: you will save your souls by fighting for the faith and for the king. Saint Anne of Auray herself appeared to me yesterday at half-past two. She said to me just as I tell it to you, 'You are a priest of Marignay?' Yes, madame, at your service. 'Well, then, I am Saint Anne of Auray, aunt of God after the fashion of Brittany. I am still at Auray, but I am here, too, because I have come to bid you tell the gars of Marignay that they have no salvation to hope for if they do not take up arms. Therefore you shall refuse them absolution of their sins if they will not serve God. You shall bless their guns, and those gars who are sinless shall not miss the Blues, because their guns are holy.' And she disappeared, leaving a smell of incense under the Goosefoot Oak. I made a mark at the spot, and the rector of Saint James has put up a fair wooden Virgin there. What is more, the mother of Pierre Leroy, called Marche-à-Terre, came to pray there in the evening, and was cured of her pains because of her son's good works. There she is, in the midst of you, and you can see her with your own eyes walking alone. This miracle has been done, like the resurrection of the blessed Marie Lambrequin, to show you that God will never desert the cause of Bretons when they fight for His servants and for the king. Therefore, dear brethren, if you would save your souls, and show yourselves champions of your lord the king, you must obey the orders of him whom the king has sent, and whom we call the Gars. Then shall you no more be like the followers of Mahound, and men will find you with all the gars of all Brittany, under the banner of God. You can take back out of the Blues' pockets all the money they have stolen; for if, while you fight, your fields be not sown, the Lord and the king make over to you the spoils of your enemies. Shall it be said, Christian brethren, that the gars of Marignay are behind the gars of Morbihan, of Saint Georges, of Vitré, of Antrain, who are all serving God and the king? Will you leave them all the booty? Will you stay like heretics, with folded arms, while so many Bretons secure their salvation and serve their king? 'Ye shall give up all for me,' the Gospel says. Have not *we* already given up the tithes? Do you, then, give up all in order to make this holy war! You shall be like the Maccabees; all your sins shall be forgiven you: you shall find your rectors and their curates in your midst; and you shall triumph! Pay attention to this,

Christian brethren," concluded he; "to-day, to-day only we have the power of blessing your guns. Those who do not avail themselves of this grace will not find the Holy One of Auray so merciful another time; and she will not listen to them as she did in the last war!"

This sermon, supported by the thunder of obstreperous lungs and by a variety of gesticulations which made the speaker perspire, had in appearance little effect. The peasants, standing motionless, with eyes riveted on the orator, looked like statues. But Mademoiselle de Verneuil soon perceived that this general attitude was the result of the spell which the abbé had cast over the crowd. He had, like all great actors, swayed his whole auditory as one man by appealing to their interests and their passions. Had he not given them absolution for their excesses beforehand, and cast loose the ties which still kept these wild men to the observance of social and religious laws? True, he had prostituted his priesthood to political purposes; but in these times of revolution each man made what he had a weapon in the cause of his party, and the peace-giving cross of Jesus was beaten into a sword as well as the food-giving plowshare. As she saw no being before her who could enter into her feelings, she turned to Francine, and was not a little surprised to see her sharing the enthusiasm and telling her beads devoutly on the rosary of Galope-Chopine, who had no doubt lent it to her during the sermon.

"Francine," she said in a low tone, "are you, too, afraid of being a *Mahumétische?*"

"Oh, mademoiselle!" replied the Breton girl, "look at Pierre's mother walking there!" And Francine's attitude showed such profound conviction that Marie understood at once the secret of this preaching, the influence of the clergy in the country districts, and the wonderful results of such scenes as now began. The peasants nearest to the altar advanced one by one and knelt down, presenting their pieces to the preacher, who laid them on the altar, Galope-Chopine being one of the first to offer his old duck gun. The three priests then chanted the hymn *Veni Creator*, while the celebrant enveloped the murderous implements in a cloud of bluish incense smoke, weaving what seemed interlaced patterns with it. As soon as the wind had dissipated this smoke, the guns were given back in succession, and each man received his own, kneeling, from the hands of the priests, who recited a Latin prayer as they returned the pieces. When the armed men had returned to their places, the deep enthusiasm of the congregation, speechless till then, broke out in a manner at once terrible and touching.

Domine, salvum fac regem!

Such was the prayer which the preacher thundered with echoing voice, and which was sung twice over with vehement shouts which were at once wild and warlike. The two notes of the word *regem*, which the peasants translated without difficulty, were poured out with such energy that Mademoiselle de Verneuil could not help thinking with emotion of the exiled Bourbons. Their memory evoked that of her own past life, and she recalled the festivities of the court, now scattered far and wide, but in which she herself had been a star. The form of the marquis intruded itself into this reverie, and with the rapid change of thought natural to women, she forgot the spectacle before her, and returned to her projects of vengeance — projects where life was at stake, and which might be wrecked by a glance. While meditating how to make herself beautiful in this the most critical moment of her existence, she remembered that she had nothing to wear in her hair at the ball, and was enticed by the notion of wearing a holly branch—the crinkled leaves and scarlet berries of which caught her attention at the moment.

"Aha!" said Galope-Chopine, nodding his head contentedly, "my gun may miss if I fire at birds now, but at Blues, never!"

Marie looked more curiously at her guide's face, and found it typical of all those she had just seen. The old Chouan seemed to be more destitute of ideas than

an average child. His cheeks and brow wrinkled with simple joy as he looked at his gun; but the expression of this joy was tinged with a fanaticism which for a moment gave his savage countenance a touch of the faults of civilization.

Soon they reached a village, or rather a collection of four or five dwellings resembling that of Galope-Chopine; and the newly-recruited Chouans arrived there while Mademoiselle de Verneuil was finishing a meal composed solely of bread, butter, milk, and cheese. This irregular band was led by the rector, who held in his hand a rude cross in guise of a standard, and was followed by a gars, proud of his post as parish ensign. Mademoiselle de Verneuil found it necessary to join this detachment, which was, like herself, making for Saint James, and which protected her, as a matter of course, from all danger from the moment when Galope-Chopine, with lucky indiscretion, told the leader that the pretty *garce* whom he was guiding was a dear friend of the Gars.

About sunset the travelers arrived at Saint James, a little town owing its name to the English who built it in the fourteenth century, when they were masters of Brittany. Before entering it, Mademoiselle de Verneuil witnessed a singular military spectacle, to which she paid little attention, fearing to be recognized by some of her enemies, and hastening her steps owing to this fear. Five or six thousand peasants were encamped in a field. Their costumes, which pretty closely resembled those of the requisitionaries at the Pilgrim, had nothing in the least warlike about them; and their tumultuous assembly was like that at a great fair. It was even needful to look somewhat narrowly in order to discover that these Bretons were armed, for their goatskins, differently arranged as they were, almost hid their guns, and their most visible weapon was the scythe with which some supplied the place of the guns which were to be served out to them. Some ate and drank; some fought or loudly wrangled; but most of them lay asleep on the ground. There was no semblance of order or of discipline. An officer in red uniform caught Mademoiselle de Verneuil's eye, and she supposed that he must be in the English service. Further off, two other officers seemed to be trying to instruct some Chouans, more intelligent than the rest, in the management of two cannon which appeared to constitute the whole park of artillery of the Royalist army that was to be.

The arrival of the gars of Marignay, who were recognized by their banner, was greeted with yells of welcome; and under cover of the excitement which the troop and the rectors aroused in the camp, Mademoiselle de Verneuil was able to cross it and enter the town without danger. She betook herself to an inn of modest appearance, and not far from the house where the ball was to be held; but the town was so crowded that, with the greatest possible trouble, she could only obtain a small and inconvenient room. When she was established there, and when Galope-Chopine had handed to Francine the band-box containing her mistress's clothes, he remained standing in an indescribable attitude of expectancy and irresolution. At another time Mademoiselle de Verneuil might have amused herself with the spectacle of a Breton peasant out of his own parish. But she broke the spell by taking from her purse four crowns of six francs each, which she presented to him. "Take them," she said, "and if you will do me a favor, go back at once to Fougères without passing through the camp, and without tasting cider."

The Chouan, astounded at such generosity, shifted his eyes by turns from the crowns he had received to Mademoiselle de Verneuil; but she waved her hand and he departed.

"How can you send him away, mademoiselle?" asked Francine. "Did you not see how the town was surrounded? How are we to get away? And who will protect us here?"

"Have you not got a protector?" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil, with a low, mocking whistle, after the manner of Marche-à-Terre, whose ways she tried to imitate.

Francine blushed, and smiled rather sadly at her mistress's merriment.

"But where is *your* protector?" she said.

Mademoiselle de Vernevil drew her dagger with a brusk movement, and showed it to the terrified Breton girl, who dropped on a chair with clasped hands.

"What have you come to look for here, Marie?" she cried, in a beseeching voice, but one which did not call for an answer.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who was busying herself in twisting about the holly twigs she had gathered, said only, "I am not sure whether this holly will look really well in my hair. A face must be as bright as mine is to endure so dark a head-dress. What do you think, Francine?"

Not a few other remarks of the same kind indicated that the strange girl was perfectly unconcerned, as she made her toilet; and any one overhearing her would have had some difficulty in understanding the gravity of the crisis in which she was risking her life. A dress of India muslin, rather short, and clinging like damp linen, showed the delicate outlines of her shape. Then she put on a red overskirt, whose folds, numerous and lengthening as they fell to one side, had the graceful sweep of a Greek tunic. This passion-provoking garment of pagan priestesses lessened the indelicacy of the costume which the fashion of the day permitted to women in dressing, and, to reduce it still further, Marie threw a gauze veil over her white shoulders, which the tunic left bare all too low. She twisted the long plaits of her hair so as to form at the back of her head the truncated and flattened cone which, by artificially lengthening the head, gives such grace to the appearance of certain antique statues, while a few curls, left loose above the forehead, fell on each side of her face in long, glistening ringlets.

In such a garb and head-dress Marie exactly resembled the most famous masterpieces of the Greek chisel. When she had by a smile signified her approbation of this coiffure, whose least detail set off the beauties of her face, she placed on it the holly wreath which she had arranged, and the numerous scarlet berries of which happily reproduced in her hair the shade of her tunic. As she twisted some of the leaves so as to make fantastic contrast between their two sides, Mademoiselle de Verneuil contemplated the whole of her toilet in the glass to judge its effect.

"I am hideous to-night," she said (as if she were in a circle of flatterers). "I look like a statue of Liberty."

Then she carefully stuck the dagger in the center of her corset, so that the rubies of its hilt might protrude, and by their ruddy reflections attract eyes to the beauties which her rival had so unworthily violated. Francine could not make up her mind to quit her mistress, and when she saw her ready to start, she devised pretexts for accompanying her out of all the obstacles which ladies have to overcome when they go to a merry-making in a little town of Lower Brittany. Must she not be there to relieve Mademoiselle de Verneuil of her cloak, of the overshoes which the mud and dirt of the streets made it necessary (though the precaution of spreading gravel over them had been taken) for her to wear, and of the gauze veil in which she hid her head from the gaze of the Chouans whom curiosity brought round the house where the festival took place? The crowd was so great that the two girls walked between rows of Chouans. Francine made no further attempt to keep her mistress back; but having put the last touches to a toilet whose merit consisted in its extreme freshness, she remained in the courtyard that she might not leave her to the chances of her fate without being able to fly to her help; for the poor girl foresaw nothing but misfortune.

A sufficiently curious scene was taking place in Montauran's apartment while Marie made her way to the ball. The young marquis was finishing his toilet and putting on the broad red ribbon which was to indicate him as the most prominent personage in the assembly, when the Abbé Gudin entered with a troubled air.

"My lord marquis," said he, "pray

come quickly. You alone can calm the storm which has arisen, I hardly know on what occasion, among our chiefs. They are talking of quitting the king's service. I believe that devil of a Rifoël to be the cause of the whole disturbance, for brawls of this kind are always brought about by some folly. They tell me that Madame du Gua upbraided him with coming to the ball very ill dressed."

"The woman must be mad!" cried the marquis, "to wish—"

"The Chevalier du Vissard," went on the abbé, cutting his leader short, "replied that if you had given him the money which was promised him in the king's name—"

"Enough, abbé, enough! I understand the whole thing now. The scene was arranged beforehand, was it not? and you are the ambassador—"

"I?" continued the abbé, interrupting again; "I, my lord marquis? I am going to give you the heartiest support, and I trust you will do me the justice to believe that the re-establishment of our altars in France, the restoration of the king to the throne of his fathers, are far more powerful stimulants of my humble efforts than that bishopric of Rennes which you—"

The abbé dared not finish, for a bitter smile had come upon the marquis's face. But the young leader immediately choked down the sad thoughts which came to him, his brow assumed a stern look, and he followed the Abbé Gudin into a room echoing with noisy clamor.

"I acknowledge no man's authority here!" cried Rifoël, casting fiery glances at all those around him, and laying his hand on his sword-hilt.

"Do you acknowledge the authority of common sense?" asked the marquis coolly. And the young Chevalier du Vissard, better known by his family name of Rifoël, was silent before the commander-in-chief of the Catholic armies.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" said the young leader, scrutinizing the faces of the company.

"The matter is, my lord marquis," answered a famous smuggler—with the awkwardness of a man of the people who is at first hampered by the restraints of prejudice in the presence of a grand seigneur, but who knows no limits when he has once crossed the barrier which separates them and sees before him only an equal—"the matter is that you have just come at the nick of time. I am not good at gilded words; so I will speak plumply and plainly. Throughout the last war I commanded five hundred men. Since we took up arms once more I have been able to put at the king's service a thousand heads as hard as my own. For seven long years I have been risking my life for the good cause. I am not throwing it in your teeth, but the laborer is worthy of his hire. Therefore, to begin with, I would be called M. de Cottereau, and I would have the rank of colonel accorded to me, otherwise I shall tender my submission to the First Consul. You see, my lord marquis, I and my men have a devil of a dunning creditor whom we must satisfy. He is here!" he added, striking his stomach.

"Has the band come?" asked the marquis of Madame du Gua, in a mocking tone.

But the smuggler had broached, however brutally, too important a subject, and these bold spirits, as calculating as they were ambitious, had been already too long in doubt as to what they might hope from the king, for mere disdain on the young chief's part to close the incident. The young and fiery Chevalier du Vissard started briskly before Montauran, and seized his hand to prevent his moving.

"Take care, my lord marquis!" said he; "you treat too lightly men who have some right to the gratitude of him whom you represent here. We know that his majesty has given you full powers to put on record our services which are to be rewarded in this world—or the next, for the scaffold stands ready for us every day. I know, for my part, that the rank of maréchal de camp—"

"You mean colonel?"

"No, marquis; Charette made me colonel. The rank I have mentioned is my incontestable right; and therefore I

do not speak for myself at this moment, but for all my bold brethren in arms whose services have need of recognition. For the present your signature and your promise will content them; and," he added, dropping his voice, "I confess that they are easily contented. But," he went on, raising it again, "when the sun rises on the Palace of Versailles, bringing happier days for the monarchy, will those faithful men who have helped the king to conquer France in France—will they be easily able to obtain favors for their families, pensions for their widows, the restoration of the estates which have been so wrongfully confiscated? I doubt it. Therefore, my lord marquis, attested proof of service will not be useless then. I will never mistrust the king, but I very heartily distrust his cormorants of ministers and courtiers, who will din into his ears considerations about the public welfare, the honor of France, the interests of the crown, and a hundred other rubbishy phrases. Men will make mock, then, of a brave Vendéan or Chouan because he is old, and because the blade he has drawn for the good cause beats against legs wizened by suffering. Can you say we are wrong?"

"You speak admirably well, Monsieur du Vissard," answered the marquis, "but a little prematurely."

"Hark you, marquis," whispered the Count de Bauvan, "Rifoël has, by my faith! said very pretty things. For your part, you are sure of always having the king's ear; but as for us, we shall only visit our master at long intervals, and I confess to you, that if you were to refuse your word as a gentleman to obtain for me in due time and place the post of Grand Master of the Waters and Forests of France, devil take me if I would risk my neck! It is no small thing to gain Normandy for the king, and so I think I may fairly hope to have the Order. But," he added, with a blush, "there is time to think of all that. God keep me from imitating these rascals, and worrying you. You will speak of me to the king, and all will go right."

Then each chief managed to inform the marquis, in a more or less ingenious fashion, of the extravagant price which he expected for his services. One modestly asked for the governorship of Brittany, another for a barony, a third for promotion, a fourth for the command of a place, and all wanted pensions.

"Why, baron!" said the marquis to M. du Guénic, "do *you* want nothing?"

"Faith! marquis, these gentlemen have left me nothing but the crown of France, but perhaps I could put up with that!"

"Why, gentlemen!" said the Abbé Gudin, in his thundering voice, "remember that if you are so eager, you will spoil all in the day of victory. Will not the king be forced to make concessions to the Revolutionaries themselves?"

"To the Jacobins?" cried the smuggler. "If his majesty will leave them to me, I will undertake to employ my thousand men in hanging them, and we shall soon get them off our hands!"

"Monsieur *de* Cottereau," said the marquis, "I perceive that some invited guests are entering the room. We ought all to vie in zeal and pains so as to induce them to join our holy enterprise; and you must understand that it is not the time to attend to your demands, however just they may be." And as he spoke he made his way toward the door as if to welcome some nobles from the neighboring country of whom he had caught sight. But the bold smuggler barred his way, though with a submissive and respectful air.

"No! no! my lord marquis, excuse me, but the Jacobins taught us too well in 1793 that the man who reaps the harvest is not the man who eats the cake. Sign this strip of paper, and to-morrow I will bring you fifteen hundred gars. If not, I shall treat with the First Consul."

Throwing a haughty glance round him, the marquis saw that the old guerilla's boldness and resolute air were not displeasing to any of the spectators of the dispute. One man only, who sat in a corner, seemed to take no part in the scene, and was busily filling a white clay pipe with tobacco. The contemptuous air with which he regarded the spokes-

man, his unassuming attitude, and the compassion for himself which the marquis read in his eyes, made Montauran scrutinize this generous-minded servant, in whom he recognized Major Brigaut. The chief walked quickly up to him.

"And you," he said, "what is *your* demand?"

"Oh! my lord marquis, if the king comes back, I shall be satisfied."

"But for yourslf?"

"For myself? Your lordship is joking."

The marquis squeezed the Breton's horny hand, and said to Madame du Gua, near whom he was standing, "Madame, I may fail in my enterprise before having time to send the king an exact report as to the state of the Catholic army in Brittany. If you live to see the restoration, forget neither this honest fellow nor the Baron du Guénic. There is more devotion in these two men than in all these people here."

And he pointed to the chiefs who were waiting, not without impatience, for the young marquis to comply with their demands. They all held in their hands open papers, in which, it would seem, their services had been certified by the Royalist leaders in former wars; and a general murmur began to rise from them. In their midst the Abbé Gudin, the Baron du Guénic, and the Comte de Bauvan were consulting how to aid the marquis in checking such exaggerated pretensions; for they could not but think the chief's position a very awkward one.

Suddenly the marquis ran his blue eyes, with an ironic flash in them, over the company, and said, in a clear voice: "Gentlemen, I do not know whether the powers which the king has graciously intrusted to me are wide enough to enable me to satisfy your demands. He may not have anticipated so much zeal and devotion; you shall judge for yourselves of my duty, and perhaps I shall be able to do it."

He disappeared, and came back promptly, holding in his hand an open letter bearing the royal seal and sign manual.

"Here," he said, "are the letters patent in virtue of which your obedience is due to me. They authorize me to govern the provinces of Brittany, Normandy, Maine, and Anjou in the king's name, and to take cognizance of the services of officers who distinguish themselves in his majesty's armies."

A movement of content passed through the assembly, and the Chouans came nearer to the marquis, respectfully encircling him, with their eyes bent on the king's signature. But the young chief, who was standing before the chimney-piece, suddenly threw the letter in the fire, where, in a moment, it was consumed.

"I will no more command," cried the young man, "any but those who see in the king a king, and not a prey to be devoured. Gentlemen, you are at liberty to leave me!"

Madame du Gua, Abbé Gudin, Major Brigaut, the Chevalier du Vissard, the Baron du Guénic, the Comte de Bauvan, gave an enthusiastic cry of *Vive le Roi*, and if at first the other chiefs hesitated for a moment to echo it, they were soon carried away by the marquis's noble conduct, begged him to forget what had happened, and assured him that, letters patent or none, he should always be their chief.

"Let us go and dance!" cried the Comte de Bauvan, "come what may! After all, friends," added he merrily, "it is better to pray to God himself than to His saints. Let us fight first, and see what happens afterward."

"That is very true," whispered Major Brigaut to the faithful Baron du Guénic. "Saving your reverence, my lord baron, I never heard the day's wage asked for in the morning."

The company scattered themselves about the rooms, where several persons were already assembled. But the marquis vainly endeavored to shake off the gloomy expression which had changed his looks. The chiefs could not fail to perceive the unfavorable impression which the scene had produced on a man whose loyalty was still associated with the fair illusions of youth; and they were ashamed.

Still, a riotous joy broke out in the

meeting, composed, as it was, of the most distinguished persons in the Royalist party, who, in the depths of a revolted province, had never been able to appreciate the events of the Revolution justly, and naturally took the most doubtful hopes for realities. The bold operations which Montauran had undertaken, his name, his fortune, his ability, made all men pluck up their courage, and brought about that most dangerous of all intoxications, the intoxication politic, which can never be cooled but by torrents of blood, almost always shed in vain. To all the company the Revolution was but a passing trouble in the kingdom of France, where, as it seemed to them, no real change had taken place. The country was still the property of the House of Bourbon, and the Royalists were so completely dominant there, that, four years before, Hoche had secured not so much a peace as an armistice. Therefore the nobles made small account of the Revolutionists: in their eyes Bonaparte was a Marceau somewhat luckier than his predecessors. So the ladies were ready to dance very merrily.

Only a few of the chiefs, who had actually fought with the Blues, comprehended the gravity of the actual crisis, and as they knew that if they spoke of the First Consul and his power to their benighted comrades, they would not be understood, they talked among themselves, looking at the ladies with a carelessness which these latter avenged by private criticisms. Madame du Gua, who seemed to be doing the honors of the ball, tried to amuse the impatience of the lady dancers by addressing to each of them conventional compliments. The screech of the instruments, which were being tuned, was already audible when she perceived the marquis, his face still bearing some traces of sadness; and she went rapidly up to him.

"I hope you are not disordered by the very ordinary inconvenience which these clowns here have caused you?" she said.

But she received no answer; for the marquis, absorbed in reverie, thought he heard certain of the considerations which Marie had prophetically laid before him amid these very chiefs at the Vivetière, to induce him to throw up the struggle of king against people. But the young man had too lofty a soul, too much pride, perhaps too much sincerity of belief, to abandon the work he had begun, and he made up his mind at this moment to follow it out boldly, in spite of obstacles. He lifted his head proudly, and only then understood what Madame du Gua was saying to him.

"Your thoughts are at Fougères, I suppose!" she said, with a bitterness which showed her sense of the uselessness of the efforts she had made to distract the marquis. "Ah! my lord, I would give my life to put *her* into your hands, and see you happy with her."

"Then, why did you take so good a shot at her?"

"Because I should like to see her either dead or in your arms. Yes! I could have loved the Marquis of Montauran while I thought him a hero. Now, I have for him nothing but friendship mingled with sorrow, when I see him cut off from glory by the wandering heart of an opera girl!"

"As far as love goes," said the marquis in a sarcastic tone, "you judge me ill. If I loved the girl, madame, I should feel less desire for her—and if it were not for you, perhaps, I should not think of her at all."

"There she is!" said Madame du Gua, suddenly.

The poor lady was terribly hurt by the haste with which the marquis turned his head; but as the bright light of the candles enabled her to see the smallest changes in the features of the man so madly loved, she thought she could see some hope of return, when he once more presented his face to her, smiling at her woman's stratagem.

"What are you laughing at?" said the Comte de Bauvan.

"At the bursting of a bubble," answered Madame du Gua joyfully. "Our marquis, if we are to believe him, cannot understand to-day how he felt his heart beat a moment for the baggage* who

*Here is the old difficulty of *fille*. No word used in modern English meets it.

called herself Mademoiselle de Verneuil—you remember?"

"Baggage, madame?" repeated the count, in a reproachful tone. "It is the duty of the author of a wrong to redress it, and I give you my word of honor that she is really the Duke de Verneuil's daughter."

"Count," said the marquis, in a voice of deep emotion, "which of your 'words' are we to believe—that given at the Vivetière, or that given at Saint James?"

A loud voice announced Mademoiselle de Verneuil. The count darted to the door, offered his hand to the beautiful stranger with tokens of the deepest respect, and, ushering her through the inquisitive crowd to the marquis and Madame du Gua, answered the astonished chief, "Believe only the word I give you to-day!"

Madame du Gua grew pale at the sight of this girl, who always presented herself at the wrong moment, and who, for a time, drew herself to her full height, casting haughty glances over the company, among whom she sought the guests of the Vivetière. She waited for the salutation which her rival was forced to give her, and without even looking at the marquis, allowed herself to be conducted to a place of honor by the count, who seated her near Madame du Gua herself. Mademoiselle de Verneuil had replied to this lady's greeting by a slight condescending nod, but, with womanly instinct, Madame du Gua showed no vexation, and promptly assumed a smiling and friendly air. Mademoiselle de Verneuil's singular dress and her great beauty drew for a moment a murmur of admiration from the company; and when the marquis and Madame du Gua turned their eyes to the guests of the Vivetière, they found in them an air of respect which seemed to be sincere, each man appearing to be looking for a way to recover the good graces of the fair Parisian whom he had mistaken. And so the adversaries were fairly met.

"But this is enchantment, mademoiselle," said Madame du Gua. "Nobody in the world but you could surprise people in this way. What! you have come here all by yourself?"

"All by myself," echoed Mademoiselle de Verneuil. "And so, madame, this evening you will have nobody but myself to kill."

"Do not be too severe," replied Madame du Gua. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you again. I was really aghast at the thought of my misconduct toward you, and I was looking for an opportunity which might allow me to set it right."

"As for your misconduct, madame, I pardon you without difficulty that toward myself. But I take to heart the death of the Blues whom you murdered. Perhaps, too, I might complain of the weighty character of your dispatches; but there, I forgive everything in consideration of the service you have done me!"

Madame du Gua lost countenance as her fair rival squeezed her hand and smiled on her with insolent grace. The marquis had remained motionless, but now he clutched the count's arm.

"You deceived me disgracefully," said he, "and you have even tarnished my honor. I am not a stage dupe; and I must have your life, or you mine."

"Marquis," answered the count haughtily, "I am ready to give you every satisfaction that you can desire."

And they moved toward the next room. Even those guests who had least inkling of the meaning of the scene began to understand the interest of it, so that when the fiddlers struck up the dance not a soul stirred.

"Mademoiselle," asked Madame du Gua, clinching her lips in a kind of fury, "what service have I had the honor of doing you to deserve this gratitude?"

"Did you not enlighten me on the true character of the Marquis of Montauran, madame? How calmly the odious man let me perish! I give him up to you with the greatest pleasure."

"Then, what have you come to seek here?" said Madame du Gua sharply.

"The esteem and the reputation of which you robbed me at the Vivetière, madame. As for anything else, do not disturb yourself. Even if the marquis

came back to me, you know that a renewal of love is never love."

Madame du Gua thereupon took Mademoiselle de Verneuil's hand with the ostentatious endearment of gesture which women, especially in men's company, like to display toward one another.

"Well, dear child, I am delighted to find you so reasonable. If the service I did you seemed rough at first," said she, pressing the hand she held, though she felt a keen desire to tear it as her fingers told her its delicate softness, "it shall be at least a thorough one. Listen to me," she went on, with a treacherous smile; "I know the character of the Gars. He would have deceived you. He does not wish to marry, and cannot marry anybody."

"Really?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; he only accepted this dangerous mission in order to earn the hand of Mademoiselle d'Uxelles, an alliance in which his majesty has promised him full support."

"What, really?"

And Mademoiselle de Verneuil added no word to this sarcastic exclamation. The young and handsome Chevalier du Vissard, eager to obtain pardon for the pleasantry which had set the example of insult at the Vivetière, advanced toward her with a respectful invitation to dance; and, extending her hand to him, she rapidly took her place in the quadrille where Madame du Gua also danced. The dress of these ladies, all of whose toilets recalled the fashions of the exiled court, and who wore powdered or frizzled hair, seemed absurd in comparison with the costume, at once rich, elegant, and severe, which the actual fashion allowed Mademoiselle de Verneuil to wear, and which, though condemned aloud, was secretly envied by the other women. As for the men, they were never weary of admiring the beauty of hair left to itself, and the details of a dress whose chief grace consisted in the shape that it displayed.

At this moment the marquis and the count re-entered the ball-room and came up behind Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who did not turn her head. Even if a mirror, which hung opposite, had not apprised her of the marquis's presence, she could have guessed it from the countenance of Madame du Gua, who hid but ill, under an outward air of indifference, the impatience with which she expected the contest certain to break out sooner or later between the two lovers. Although Montauran was talking to the count and two other persons, he could nevertheless hear the remarks of the dancers of both sexes, who, according to the change of the figures, were brought from time to time into the place of Mademoiselle de Verneuil and her neighbors.

"O, yes; certainly, madame," said one; "she came by herself."

"She must be very brave," said his partner.

"Why, if I were dressed like that, I should think I had nothing on," said another lady.

"Well, the costume is hardly proper," replied the gentleman; "but she is so pretty, and it suits her so well!"

"Really, I am quite ashamed, for her sake, to see how perfectly she dances. Don't you think she has exactly the air of an opera girl?" answered the lady, with a touch of jealousy.

"Do you think she has come here as an ambassadress from the First Consul?" asked a third.

"What a joke!" replied the gentleman.

"Her innocence will hardly be her dowry," said the lady, with a laugh.

The Gars turned round sharply to see what woman it was who allowed herself such a gibe, and Madame du Gua looked him in the face, as who would say plainly, "You see what they think of her!"

"Madame," said the count, with another laugh, to Marie's enemy, "it is only ladies who have as yet deprived her of innocence."

The marquis inwardly pardoned Bauvan for all his misdeeds; but when he ventured to cast a glance at his mistress, whose beauties, like those of all women, were enhanced by the candle-light, she turned her back to him as she returned to her

place, and began to talk to her partner, so that the marquis could overhear her voice in its most caressing tones.

"The First Consul sends us very dangerous ambassadors," said the chevalier.

"Sir," she replied, "that observation was made before, at the Vivetière."

"But you have as good a memory as the king!" rejoined the gentleman, vexed at his blunder.

"One must needs remember injuries in order to pardon them," said she briskly, and relieving his embarrassment with a smile.

"Are we all included in this amnesty?" asked the marquis.

But she darted out to dance with the excitement of a child, leaving him unanswered and abashed. He gazed upon her with a melancholy coldness, which she perceived. And then she bent her head in one of the coquettish attitudes in which her exquisitely proportioned neck allowed her to indulge, forgetting no possible movement which could show the rare perfection of her form. Enticing as Hope, she was as fugitive as Memory; and to see her thus was to desire the possession of her at any cost. She knew this well, and her consciousness of beauty shed an inexpressible charm over her face. Montauran felt a whirlwind of love, of rage, of madness, rising in his heart; he pressed the count's hand strongly, and withdrew.

"What! has he gone?" asked Mademoiselle de Verneuil, as she came back to her place.

The count darted to the neighboring room, and made a knowing gesture to his *protégée* as he brought the Gars back to her.

"He is mine!" she thought, as she perused in the mirror the countenance of Montauran, whose face was slightly agitated, but bright with hope.

She received the young chief at first with glum silence, but she did not leave him again without a smile. His look of distinction was so great, that she felt proud of being able to tyrannize over him, and determined to make him pay dearly for a kind word or two, that he might know their value—thereby obeying an instinct which all women follow in one degree or another. The dance finished, all the gentlemen of the Vivetière party surrounded Marie, each begging pardon for his error with compliments more or less well turned. But he whom she wished to see at her feet kept aloof from the group of her subjects.

"He thinks I still love him," she thought, "and he will not be lost in the common herd."

She refused the next dance; and then, as though the festival had been given in her honor, she went from quadrille to quadrille leaning on the arm of the Comte de Bauvan, with whom she chose to be in a way familiar. The adventure of the Vivetière was by this time known in its minutest details to the whole company, thanks to the pains taken by Madame du Gua, who hoped, by thus publicly connecting Mademoiselle de Verneuil and the marquis, to throw another stumbling-block in the way of their reunion. Hence the sundered lovers were the object of general attention. Montauran dared not enter into conversation with his mistress; for the consciousness of his misdoings and the violence of his rekindled desires made her almost terrible to him; while, on her side, the girl kept watching his face of pretended calm, while she seemed to be looking at the dancing.

"It is terribly hot here!" she said to her cavalier. "I see Monsieur de Montauran's forehead is quite moist. Take me somewhere else where I can breathe—I feel stifled."

And, with a nod, she indicated to the count a neighboring apartment, which was occupied only by some card-players. The marquis followed his mistress, whose words he had guessed by the mere motion of her lips. He ventured to hope that she was only withdrawing from the crowd in order to give him an interview, and this supposed favor added a violence as yet unknown to his passion; for every attempt which he had made to conquer his love during the last few days had but increased it. Mademoiselle de Verneuil took pleasure in tormenting the young chief; and her glance, soft as velvet when it lit

upon the count, became dark and harsh when it chanced to meet the marquis's eyes. Montauran seemed to make a painful effort, and said in a choked voice :

"Will you not, then, forgive me?"

"Love," she answered coldly, "pardons nothing, or pardons all. But," she went on, seeing him give a start of joy, "it must be love—"

She had once more taken the count's arm, and passed rapidly into a kind of boudoir, serving as antechamber to the card-room. The marquis followed her.

"You shall hear me!" he cried.

"Sir," answered she, "you will make people believe that I came here for your sake, and not out of self-respect. If you do not cease this hateful persecution I must withdraw."

"Well, then," said he, remembering one of the maddest actions of the last Duke of Lorraine, "give me leave to speak to you for the time only during which I can hold this live coal in my hand." He stooped to the hearth, picked up a brand, and grasped it hard. Mademoiselle de Verneuil's face flushed; she suddenly dropped the arm of the count (who quietly retired, leaving the lovers alone), and stared in wonder at Montauran. So mad an act had touched her heart, for in love there is nothing more effective than a piece of senseless courage.

"All that you prove by this," said she, as she tried to make him throw the brand away, "is that you might give me up to the most cruel tortures. You are always in extremes. On the faith of a fool's word and a woman's slander, you suspected her who had just saved your life of being capable of selling you."

"Yes," said he with a smile, "I was cruel to you. Forget it forever; I shall never forget it. But listen : I was abominably deceived; but so many circumstances during that fatal day were against you."

"And were these circumstances enough to extinguish your love?"

As he hesitated to answer, she rose with a gesture of scorn.

"Oh! Marie, from this time I will believe none but you!"

"Throw away that fire, I tell you! You are mad! Open your hand—I will have it!"

He chose to oppose some resistance to his mistress's gentle violence, in order to prolong the keen pleasure which he felt in being closely pressed by her tiny, caressing fingers. But she at last succeeded in opening the hand, which she would gladly have kissed. A flow of blood had quenched the glowing wood.

"Now, what good did that do you?" she said; and making a bandage of her handkerchief, she applied it to the wound, which was not deep, and which the marquis quickly covered with his glove. Madame du Gua had come on tiptoe into the card-room, and cast furtive glances at the lovers, whose eyes she adroitly escaped by leaning back at their least movement. But she could not very easily understand their conversation from what she saw of their action.

"If all they told you of me were true, confess that I should be well avenged at this moment," said Marie, with a malicious air which turned the marquis pale.

"But what were the feelings, then, that brought you here?"

"My dear boy, you are a very great coxcomb. Do you really think that you can despise a woman like me with impunity? I came both for your sake and for my own," she went on after a pause, putting her hand to the cluster of rubies which lay in the center of her breast, and showing him the blade of her dagger.

"What does all this mean?" thought Madame du Gua.

"But," continued Marie, "you still love me—at any rate, you still feel a desire for me, and the folly you have just committed," said she, taking his hand, "has given me proof of it. I have recovered the position I wished to hold, and I can go away satisfied. He who loves is always sure of pardon. For my part, I am loved; I have regained the esteem of the man who is all the world to me; I can die!"

"Then, you love me still?" said Montauran.

"Did I say so?" she answered mockingly, and following with joy the progress of the horrible torture which, at her first coming, she had begun to apply to him. "Had I not to make sacrifices in order to get here? I saved Monsieur de Bauvan's life, and he, more grateful than you, has offered me his name and fortune in exchange for my protection. It did not occur to *you* to do that!"

The marquis, aghast at these last words, checked the most violent access of wrath which he had yet suffered at feeling himself duped by the count, but did not answer.

"Ah! you are considering!" she said, with a bitter smile.

"Mademoiselle," answered the young man, "your doubts justify mine."

"Sir! let us quit this room!" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil, as she saw the skirt of Madame du Gua's gown. And she rose; but her wish to drive her rival desperate made her linger.

"Do you wish to plunge me into hell?" asked the marquis, taking her hand and pressing it hard.

"Is it not five days since you plunged *me* there? At this very moment are you not leaving me in the cruelest uncertainty whether your love is sincere or not?"

"But how can I tell if you are not pushing your vengeance to the point by making yourself mistress of my life, for the purpose of tarnishing it, instead of planning my death?"

"Ah! you do not love me! You think of yourself, not of me!" said she, furiously, and weeping, for the coquette knew well the power of her eyes when they were drowned in tears.

"Well, then," said he, no longer master of himself, "take my life, but dry your tears!"

"Oh! my love!" cried she in a stifled voice, "these are the words, the tones, the looks, that I waited for before setting your happiness above my own. But, sir," she went on, "I must ask you for a last proof of your affection, which you say is so great. I will stay here no longer than is necessary to make it thoroughly known that you are mine. I would not even drink a glass of water in a house where lives a woman who has twice tried to kill me, who is perhaps now plotting some treason against us, and who at this very moment is listening to our talk," said she, guiding the marquis's eyes with her finger to the floating folds of Madame du Gua's dress. Then she dried her tears, and bent toward the ear of the young chief, who shivered as he felt himself caressed by her sweet, moist breath.

"Get ready for our departure," said she. "You shall take me back to Fougères, and there, and there only, you shall know whether I love you or not. For the second time I trust myself to you: will you trust yourself a second time to me?"

"Ah, Marie! you have brought me to such a pass that I know no more what I am doing. Your words, your looks, yourself, have intoxicated me, and I am ready to do anything you wish."

"Well, then, make me for a moment quite happy. Let me enjoy the only triumph I have longed for. I want to breathe freely once, to live the life I have dreamed, and to fill myself full of my dreams, before they vanish. Let us go back; come and dance with me."

They returned together to the ballroom, and although Mademoiselle de Verneuil had received as complete and hearty a satisfaction of her vanity as ever woman could, the mysterious sweetness of her eyes, the delicate smile on her lips, the brisk movement of a lively dance, kept the secret of her thoughts as the sea keeps those of a murderer who drops into it a heavy corpse. Nevertheless, the company uttered an admiring murmur when she threw herself into the arms of her lover for the waltz, and the two, voluptuously clasping each other, with languishing eyes and drooping heads, whirled round, clasping each other with a kind of frenzy.

"Count," said Madame du Gua to Monsieur de Bauvan, "go and find out if Pille-Miche is in camp; bring him to me; and be certain that you shall obtain from me in return for this slight service anything

you wish, even my hand. My vengeance," continued she to herself, as she saw him go off, "will cost me dear; but this time I will not miss it."

A few moments later, Mademoiselle de Verneuil and the marquis were seated in a berline horsed with four stout steeds. Francine, surprised at finding the two supposed enemies with clasped hands and on the best terms, sat speechless, and did not dare to ask herself whether this was treachery or love on her mistress's part. Thanks to the silence and to the darkness of night, Montauran could not perceive Mademoiselle de Verneuil's agitation as she drew near Fougères. At length the feeble glimmer of dawn gave a far-off sight of the steeple of Saint Léonard's, and at the same moment Marie said to herself, "Death is near!"

At the first rising ground the same thought occurred to each of the lovers. They alighted from the carriage and climbed the hill on foot, as though in remembrance of their first meeting. When Marie had taken the marquis's arm and walked a short distance, she thanked the young man with a smile for having respected her silence. Then, as they reached the crown of the hill whence Fougères was visible, she threw aside her reverie altogether.

"You must come no further," she said. "My power would not again avail to save you from the Blues to-day."

Montauran looked at her with some surprise; she gave a sad smile, pointed to a bowlder as if bidding him sit down, and herself remained standing in a melancholy posture. The emotions which tore her soul no longer permitted her to practice the artifices of which she had been so prodigal, and for the moment she could have knelt on burning coals without feeling them more than the marquis had felt the lighted wood which he had grasped to attest the violence of his passion. She gazed at her lover with a look full of the profoundest grief before she said to him the appalling words:

"All your suspicions of me are true!"

The marquis gave a sudden movement, but she said, clasping her hands: "For pity's sake, hear me without interruption. I am really and truly," she went on in a faltering tone, "the daughter of the Duke de Verneuil, but his natural daughter only. My mother, who was of the house of Casteran, and who took the veil to escape the sufferings which her family were preparing for her, atoned for her fault by fifteen years of weeping, and died at Séez. Only on her death-bed did the dear abbess address to the man who had abandoned her an entreaty in my favor; for she knew that I had neither friends, prospects, nor fortune. This man, never forgotten under the roof of Francine's mother, to whose care I had been committed, had himself forgotten his child. Nevertheless, the duke received me with pleasure, and acknowledged me because I was beautiful; perhaps, also, because I reminded him of his youth.

"He was one of those *grande seigneurs* who, in the former reign, prided themselves on showing how a man may procure pardon for a crime by committing it gratefully. I will say no more—he was my father! But permit me to show you the evil effect which my sojourn at Paris could not help producing on my mind. The society which the Duke de Verneuil kept, and that to which he introduced me, doted on the mocking philosophy which then charmed all France, because it was the rule to make witty profession of it. The brilliant talk which pleased my ear was recommended by its ingenious observations, or by a neatly-turned contempt of religion and of truth generally. As they mocked certain feelings and thoughts, men drew them all the better that they did not share them; and they were as agreeable by dint of their skill in epigram, as by the sprightliness with which they could put a whole story in a phrase. But they too often made the mistake of excessive *esprit*, and wearied women by making love a business rather than an affair of the heart.

"I made but a weak resistance to this torrent. I had a soul (pardon my vanity!) sufficiently full of passion to feel that *esprit* had withered all hearts; but the life which I then led had the result of

bringing about a perpetual conflict between my natural sentiments and the vicious habits I had contracted. Some persons of parts had delighted to foster in me that freedom of thought, that contempt of public opinion, which deprives woman of the modesty of soul that gives her half her charm. Alas! adversity could not eradicate the faults which prosperity had caused. My father," she continued, after heaving a sigh, "the Duke de Verneuil, died after formally acknowledging me, and making in my favor a will which considerably diminished the fortune of my brother, his legitimate son.

"One morning I found myself without a shelter and without a guardian. My brother contested the will which made me a rich woman. Three years spent in a wealthy household had developed my vanity, and my father, by gratifying my every wish, had created in me a craving for luxury and habits of indulgence, the tyranny of which my young and simple mind did not comprehend. A friend of my father's, the Marshal-Duke de Lenoncourt, who was seventy years old, offered to be my guardian; I accepted, and a few days after the beginning of the hateful lawsuit, I found myself once more in a splendid establishment, where I enjoyed all the advantages which my brother's cruelty had refused me over my father's coffin. Every evening the marshal spent some hours with me, and the old man spoke all the time nothing but words of gentle consolation. His whole air and the various touching proofs of paternal tenderness which he gave me, seemed to guarantee that his heart held no other sentiments than my own; and I was glad to think myself his daughter. I accepted the jewels he offered me, and hid from him none of the fancies which I found him so glad to satisfy.

"One evening I learned that the whole town thought me the poor old man's mistress. It was demonstrated to me that it was out of my power to regain the reputation for innocence of which society causelessly robbed me. The man who had practiced on my inexperience could not be my lover, and would not be my husband. In the very same week in which I made the hideous discovery—on the very eve of the day fixed for my marriage with him (for I had insisted on bearing his name, the only reparation he could make me)—he fled to Coblentz. I was insultingly driven from the little house in which the marshal had placed me, and which did not belong to him. So far I have told you the truth, as if I were in the presence of God Himself; but from this point ask not, I pray you, from a wretched girl, an exact account of the miseries buried in her memory.

"One day, sir, I found myself united to Danton! A few days later the huge oak round which I had cast my arms was uprooted by the storm. When I saw myself once more immersed in poverty, I made up my mind to die. I know not whether I was unconsciously counseled by love of life, by the hope of wearing out my ill-luck and finding at the bottom of this interminable abyss the happiness which fled my grasp, or whether I was won over by the arguments of a young man of Vendôme, who for two years past has fastened himself on me like a serpent on a tree, in the belief, no doubt, that some extremity of misfortune may induce me to yield to him. In fine, I cannot tell why I accepted the odious mission of making myself beloved by a stranger whom I was to betray for the price of three hundred thousand francs. I saw you, sir, and I recognized you at once by one of those presentiments which never deceive us; yet I amused myself by doubting, for the more I loved you, the more the conviction of my love was terrible to me.

"Thus, in saving you from the hands of Commandant Hulot, I threw up my part, and resolved to deceive the executioners, and not their victim. I was wrong to play thus with men's lives, with policy, and with my own self, after the fashion of a careless girl who sees nothing in the world but sentiment. I thought I was loved, and in the hope of a new beginning of life I let myself drift. But all things, myself perhaps included, betrayed my past excesses; for you must have had your suspicions of a

woman so full of passion as I am. Alas! can any one refuse pardon to my love, and my dissembling? Yes, sir! it seemed to me that I was awaking from a long and painful sleep, and that at my waking I found myself once more sixteen. Was I not in Alencon, which was connected with the chaste and pure memories of my youth? I was simple enough, I was mad enough, to believe that love would give me a baptism of innocence. For a moment I thought myself still a maid because I had never yet loved. But yesterday evening your passion seemed to me a real passion, and a voice asked me, 'Why deceive him?'

"Know, then, lord marquis," she continued in a deep tone, which seemed proudly to challenge reprobation, "know it well that I am but a creature without honor, unworthy of you. From this moment I take up my part of wanton once more, weary of playing that of a woman to whom you had restored all the chastities of the heart. Virtue is too heavy a load for me; and I should despise you if you were weak enough to wed me. A Count de Bauvan might commit a folly of that kind, but you, sir, be worthy of your own future, and leave me without a regret. The courtesan in me, look you, would be too exacting; she would love you in another fashion from that of the simple, innocent girl who felt in her heart for one instant the exquisite hope of some day being your companion, of making you ever happy, of doing you honor, of becoming a noble and worthy wife to you; and who, from this sentiment, has drawn the courage to revive her evil nature of vice and infamy, in order to set an eternal barrier between you and herself. To you I sacrifice honor and fortune; my pride in this sacrifice will support me in my misery, and fate may do with me as it will. I will never give you up to them. I shall return to Paris, where your name shall be to me as another self, and the splendid distinction which you will give it will console me for all my woes. As for you, you are a man; you will not forget me. Farewell!"

She darted away in the direction of the valleys of Saint Sulpice, and disappeared before the marquis could rise to stop her. But she doubled back on her steps, availed herself of a hollow rock as a hiding-place, raised her head, scrutinized Montauran with a curiosity which was mingled with doubt, and saw him walking he knew not whither, like a man overwhelmed.

"Is he, then, but a weakling?" she said, when he was lost to sight, and she felt that they were parted. "Will he understand me?"

She shuddered; then she bent her steps suddenly and rapidly toward Fougères, as if she feared that the marquis would follow to the town, where death awaited him.

"Well, Francine, what did he say to you?" she asked her faithful Breton maid when they met again.

"Alas! Marie, I pity him! You great ladies make your tongues daggers to stab men with."

"What did he look like, then, when he met you?"

"Do you think he even saw me? Oh, Marie, he loves you!"

"Ah, yes," answered she, "he loves me, or he loves me not—two words which mean heaven or hell to me. Between the extremes I see no middle space on which I can set my foot."

Having thus worked out her terrible fate, Marie could give herself up entirely to sorrow; and the countenance which she had kept up hitherto by a mixture of diverse sentiments experienced so rapid a change that, after a day in which she hovered unceasingly between presages of happiness and forebodings of despair, she lost the fresh and radiant beauty whose first cause lies either in the absence of all passion or in the intoxication of happiness.

Curious to know the result of her wild enterprise, Hulot and Corentin had called upon Marie shortly after her arrival. She received them with a smiling air.

"Well," said she to the commandant, whose anxious face expressed considerable inquisitiveness, "the fox has come back within range of your guns, and you will soon gain a glorious victory!"

"What has happened, then?" asked Corentin carelessly, but casting on Mademoiselle de Verneuil one of the sidelong glances by which diplomatists of this stamp spy out others' thoughts.

"Why," she answered, "the Gars is more in love with me than ever, and I made him come with us up to the very gates of Fougères."

"It would appear that your power ceased there," retorted Corentin, "and that the *ci-devant's* fear is stronger than the love with which you inspired him."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil threw a scornful look at Corentin.

"You judge him by yourself," answered she.

"Well," said he, without showing any emotion, "why did you not bring him straight to us?"

"If he really loves me, commandant," said she to Hulot, with a malicious look, "would you never forgive me if I saved him by taking him away from France?"

The old soldier stepped briskly up to her, and seized her hand to kiss it, with a kind of enthusiasm. But then he looked steadily at her and said, his face darkening:

"You forget my two friends and my sixty-three men!"

"Ah! commandant," she said, with all the *naiveté* of passion, "that was not his fault. He was duped by a wicked woman, Charette's mistress, who I believe would drink the blood of the Blues."

"Come, Marie," said Corentin, "do not play tricks with the commandant; he does not understand your pleasantries yet."

"Be silent," she answered, "and know that the day when you become a little too repulsive to me will be your last."

"I see, mademoiselle," said Hulot without bitterness, "that I must make ready for battle."

"You are not in case to give it, my dear colonel. At Saint James I saw that they had more than six thousand men, with regular troops, artillery, and English officers. But what would become of all these folk without *him?* I hold with Fouché, that his head is everything."

"Well, shall we have his head?" asked Corentin, out of patience.

"I don't know," said she carelessly.

"English!" cried Hulot angrily; "that was the only thing wanting to make him out and out a brigand! Ah, I'll English you, I will!" But he added to Corentin, when they were a little distance from the house, "It would appear, citizen diplomatist, that you let yourself be routed at regular intervals by that girl."

"It is very natural, citizen commandant," answered Corentin thoughtfully, "that you should not have known what to make of all she said to us. You military gentlemen do not perceive that there are more ways of making war than one. To make cunning use of the passions of men and women, as though they were springs worked upon for the benefit of the state, to adjust all the wheels in the mighty machine which we call a government, to take delight in shutting up in it the most refractory sentiments like catch-springs, to be watched over for amusement—is not this to be an actual creator, and to put one's self, like God, at the center of the universe?"

"You will be good enough to let me prefer my trade to yours," replied the soldier dryly. "You may do what you like with your machinery, but I acknowledge no other superior than the Minister of War. I have my orders; I shall begin my operations with fellows who will not sulk or shirk, and I shall meet in front the foe whom you want to steal on from behind."

"Oh, you can get into marching order if you like," answered Corentin. "From what the girl lets me guess, enigmatic as she seems to you, you will have some skirmishing, and I shall procure you before long the pleasure of a tête-à-tête with the brigand chief."

"How so?" said Hulot, stepping back to get a better view of this strange personage.

"Mademoiselle de Verneuil loves the Gars," said Corentin, in a stifled voice, "and perhaps he loves her. A marquis with the red ribbon, young, able, perhaps even (for who knows?) still rich—there

are sufficient temptations for you. She would be a fool not to fight for her own hand, and try to marry him rather than give him up. She is trying to throw dust in our eyes; but I read in her own some irresolution. In all probability the two lovers will have an assignation; perhaps it is already arranged. Well, then, to-morrow I shall have my man fast! Hitherto he has only been the Republic's enemy; a few minutes since he became mine. Now, every man who has taken a fancy to get between me and that girl has died on the scaffold."

When he had finished, Corentin fell back into a study, which prevented him from seeing the intense disgust depicted on the countenance of the generous soldier, as he fathomed the depth of the intrigue and the working of the engines employed by Fouché. And so Hulot made up his mind to thwart Corentin in every point not absolutely hurtful to the success and the objects of the Government, and to give the Republic's foe the chance of dying with honor and sword in hand before becoming the prey of the executioner, whose jackal this agent of the superior police avowed himself to be.

"If the First Consul would listen to me," said he to himself, turning his back on Corentin, "he would let these foxes and the aristocrats, who are worthy of each other, fight it out between them, and employ soldiers on very different business."

Corentin on his side looked coolly at the soldier (whose face had now betrayed his thoughts), and his eyes recovered the sardonic expression which showed the superior intelligence of this subaltern Machiavel.

"Give three yards of blue cloth to brutes of this kind," thought he, "stick a piece of iron by their sides, and they will fancy that in politics there is only one proper way of killing a man." He paced up and down slowly for a few moments; then he said to himself suddenly: "Yes! the hour is come. The woman shall be mine! For five years the circle I have drawn round her has narrowed, little by little. I have her now, and with her help I will climb as high in the Government as Fouché. Yes! let her lose the one man she has loved, and grief will give her to me body and soul. It only remains to watch night and day in order to discover her secret."

A minute later, an observer might have descried Corentin's pale face across the window-panes of a house whence he could inspect every living thing that entered the cul-de-sac formed by the row of houses running parallel to Saint Léonard's Church. With the patience of a cat watching a mouse, Corentin was still, on the morning of the next day, giving heed to the least noise, and severely scrutinizing every passer-by. The day then beginning was a market day. Although in these unfortunate times the peasants were with difficulty induced to risk themselves in the town, Corentin saw a man of a gloomy countenance, dressed in a goatskin, and carrying on his arm a small round flat basket, who was making his way toward Mademoiselle de Verneuil's house, after casting round him glances indifferent enough. Corentin went downstairs, intending to wait for the peasant when he came out; but suddenly it occurred to him that if he could make a sudden appearance at Mademoiselle de Verneuil's he might perhaps surprise at a single glance the secrets hid in the messenger's basket. Besides, common fame had taught him that it was almost impossible to get the better of the impenetrable answers of Bretons and Normans.

"Galope-Chopine!" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil, when Francine ushered in the Chouan. "Can it be that I am loved?" she added in a whisper to herself.

An instinct of hope shed the brightest hues over her complexion, and diffused joy throughout her heart. Galope-Chopine looked from the mistress of the house to Francine, his glances at the latter being full of mistrust; but a gesture from Mademoiselle de Verneuil reassured him.

"Madame," said he, "toward the stroke of two he will be at my house, and will wait for you there."

Her emotions allowed Mademoiselle de Verneuil to make no other reply than an inclination of the head, but a Samoyede could have understood the full meaning of this. At the very same moment the steps of Corentin echoed in the salon. Galope-Chopine did not disturb himself in the least when Mademoiselle de Verneuil's start and her looks at once showed him a danger-signal; and as soon as the spy exhibited his cunning face, the Chouan raised his voice ear-piercingly:

"Oh, yes!" said he to Francine, "there is Breton butter and Breton butter. You want Gibarry butter, and you will only give eleven sous the pound. You ought not to have sent for me. That is good butter, that is!" said he, opening his basket and showing two little pats of butter of Barbette's making. "You must pay a fair price, good lady. Come, let us say another sou!"

His hollow voice showed not the least anxiety, and his green eyes, shaded by thick, grizzly eyebrows, bore without flinching Corentin's piercing gaze.

"Come, good fellow, hold your tongue. You did not come here to sell butter; for you are dealing with a lady who never cheapened anything in her life. Your business, old boy, is one which will make you a head shorter some day!" And Corentin, with a friendly clap on the shoulder, added, "You can't go on long serving both Chouans and Blues."

Galope-Chopine had need of all his presence of mind to gulp down his wrath without denying this charge, which, owing to his avarice, was a true one. He contented himself with replying:

"The gentleman is pleased to be merry—"

Corentin had turned his back on the Chouan, but in the act of saluting Mademoiselle de Verneuil, whose heart was in her mouth, he was easily able to keep an eye on him in the mirror. Galope-Chopine, who thought himself out of the spy's sight, questioned Francine with a look, and Francine pointed to the door, saying: "Come with me, good man; we shall come to terms, no doubt."

Nothing had escaped Corentin, neither the tightened lips which Mademoiselle de Verneuil's smile hid but ill, nor her blush, nor her altered expression, nor the Chouan's anxiety, nor Francine's gesture. He had seen it all; and, convinced that Galope-Chopine was an emissary of the marquis, he stopped him as he was going out, by catching hold of the long hair of his goatskin, brought him in front of himself, and looked straight at him, saying:

"Where do you live, good friend? *I* want some butter."

"Good gentleman," answered the Chouan, "all Fougères knows where I live. I am, as you may say—"

"Corentin!" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil, interrupting Galope-Chopine's answer, "you are very forward to pay me visits at this hour, and to catch me like this, scarcely dressed. Let the peasant alone. He does not understand your tricks any more than I understand their object. Go, good fellow."

Galope-Chopine hesitated for a moment before going. His irresolution, whether it were real or feigned, as of a poor wretch who did not know which of the two to obey, had already begun to impose on Corentin, when the Chouan, at a commanding signal from the young lady, departed with heavy steps. Mademoiselle de Verneuil and Corentin gazed at each other in silence; and this time Marie's clear eyes could not endure the blaze of dry light which poured from the man's looks. The air of resolve with which the spy had entered the room, an expression on his face which was strange to Marie, the dull sound of his squeaky voice, his attitude—all alarmed her; she understood that a secret struggle was beginning between them, and that he was straining all the power of his sinister influence against her. But if at the moment she caught a full and distinct view of the abyss toward which she was hastening, she drew from her love strength to shake off the icy chill of her presentiments.

"Corentin!" she said, merrily enough, "I hope you will be good enough to allow me to finish my toilet."

"Marie," said he—"yes, give me leave

to call you so—you do not know me yet. Listen! a less sharp-sighted man than myself would have already discovered your affection for the Marquis of Montauran. I have again and again offered you my heart and my hand. You did not think me worthy of you, and perhaps you are right. But if you think your station too lofty, your beauty or your mind too great for me, I can find means to draw you down to my level. My ambition and my precepts have not inspired you with much esteem for me, and here, to speak frankly, you are wrong. Men, as a rule, are not worth even my estimate of them, which is next to nothing. I shall attain of a certainty to a high position, the honors of which will please you. Who can love you better, who can make you more completely mistress of himself than the man who has already loved you for five years? Although I run the risk of seeing you conceive an unfavorable idea of me (for you do not believe it possible to renounce the person one adores through mere excess of love), I will give you the measure of the disinterestedness of my affection for you. Do not shake your pretty head in that way. If the marquis loves you, marry him; but make yourself quite sure first of his sincerity. I should be in despair if I knew you had been deceived, for I prefer your happiness to my own. My resolution may surprise you; but pray attribute it to nothing but the commonsense of a man who is not fool enough to wish to possess a woman against her will. And so it is myself, and not you, whom I hold guilty of the uselessness of my efforts. I hope to gain you by force of submission and devotion, for, as you know, I have long sought to make you happy after my own fashion, but you have never chosen to reward me in any way."

"I have endured your company," she said haughtily.

"Add that you are sorry for having done so."

"After the disgraceful plot in which you have entangled me, must I still thank you?"

"When I suggested to you an enterprise which was not blameless in the eyes of timid souls," answered he boldly, "I had nothing but your good fortune in view. For my own part, whether I win or fail, I shall find means of making either result useful to the success of my designs. If you married Montauran, I should be charmed to do yeoman's service to the Bourbon cause at Paris, where I belong to the Clichy Club. Any incident which put me in communication with the princes would decide me to abandon the interests of a Republic which is rapidly hastening to its decline and fall. General Bonaparte is too clever not to feel that he cannot be in Germany, in Italy, and here, where the Revolution is succumbing, all at once. It is pretty clear that he brought about the 18th Brumaire only to stand on better terms with the Bourbons in treating with them concerning France, for he is a fellow with his wits about him, and with foresight enough. But men of policy must anticipate him on his own road. A scruple about betraying France is but one more of those which we men of parts leave to fools. I will not hide from you that I have all necessary powers for treating with the Chouan chiefs, as well as for arranging their ruin. My patron, Fouché, is deep enough, and has always played a double game. During the Terror he was at once for Robespierre and for Danton—"

"Whom you basely deserted," said she.

"Nonsense!" answered Corentin. "He is dead; think not of him. Come! speak to me frankly, since I have set you the example. This demi-brigadier is sharper than he looks, and if you wish to outwit his vigilance I might be of some service to you. Remember that he has filled the valleys with counter-Chouans, and would quickly get wind of your rendezvous. If you stay here under his eyes, you are at the mercy of his police. Only see how quickly he found out that this Chouan was in your house! Must not his sagacity as a soldier show him that your least movements will be a tell-tale to him of those of the marquis, if the marquis loves you?"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil had never

heard a voice so gently affectionate. Corentin seemed to speak in entire good faith and full trust. The poor girl's heart was so susceptible to generous impressions that she was on the point of yielding her secret to the serpent who was winding his coils round her. But she bethought her that there was no proof of the sincerity of this artful language, and so she had no scruple in duping him who was acting the spy on her.

"Well, Corentin," said she, "you have guessed aright. Yes, I love the marquis, but he loves not me; at least, I fear it, for the rendezvous which he has given me seems to hide some trap."

"But," said Corentin, "you told us yesterday that he had accompanied you to Fougères. Had he wished to use violence toward you, you would not be here."

"Corentin, your heart is seared. You can calculate scientifically on the course of human life in general, and yet not on those of a single passion. Perhaps this is the reason of the constant repulsion I feel for you. But since you are so perspicacious, try to guess why a man from whom I parted roughly the day before yesterday is impatiently expecting me today on the Mayenne road, in a house at Florigny, toward evening."

At this confession, which seemed to have escaped her in a moment of excitement natural enough to a creature so frank and so passionate, Corentin flushed; for he was still young. He cast sidewise on her one of those piercing glances which quest for the soul. Mademoiselle de Verneuil's *naiveté* was so well feigned that she deceived the spy, and he answered with artificial good-nature:

"Would you like me to accompany you at a distance? I would take some disguised soldiers with me, and we should be at your orders."

"Agreed," she said; "but promise me on your honor—ah, no! I do not believe in that; on your salvation—but you do not believe in God; on your soul—but perhaps you have none. What guarantee of fidelity can you give me? Still, I will trust you, and I put in your hands what is more than my life—either my vengeance or my love!"

The faint smile which appeared on Corentin's pale countenance acquainted Mademoiselle de Verneuil with the danger she had just avoided. The agent, his nostrils contracting instead of dilating, took his victim's hand, kissed it with marks of the deepest respect, and left her with a bow which was not devoid of elegance. Three hours after this interview, Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who feared Corentin's return, slipped furtively out of the gate of Saint-Léonard and gained the little path of the Nid-aux-Crocs, leading to the Nancon Valley. She thought herself safe as she passed unnoticed through the labyrinth of tracks leading to Galope-Chopine's cabin, whither she advanced gayly, led by the hope of at last finding happiness, and by the desire of extricating her lover from his threatened fate. Meanwhile Corentin was engaged in hunting for the commandant. It was with difficulty that he recognized Hulot when he found him in a small open space, where he was busy with some military preparations. The brave veteran had indeed made a sacrifice the merit of which can hardly be put sufficiently high. His pigtail and his mustaches were shaved, and his hair, arranged like a priest's, had a dash of powder. Shod with great hobnailed shoes, his old blue uniform and his sword exchanged for a goat-skin, a belt garnished with pistols, and a heavy rifle, he was inspecting two hundred men of Fougères, whose dress might have deceived the eyes of the most experienced Chouan. The warlike spirit of the little town and the Breton character were both exhibited in this scene, which was not the first of its kind. Here and there mothers and sisters were bringing to their sons and brothers brandy-flasks or pistols which had been forgotten. More than one old man was examining the number and goodness of the cartridges carried by these National Guards, who were disguised as counter-Chouans, and whose cheerfulness seemed rather to indicate a hunting-party than a dangerous expedition.

For them, the skirmishes of the Chou-

an war, where the Bretons of the towns fought with the Bretons of the country, seemed to have taken the place of the tourneys of chivalry. This patriotic enthusiasm perhaps owed its origin to the acquisition of some of the confiscated property; but much of its ardor was also due to the better appreciation of the benefits of the Revolution which existed in the towns, to party fidelity, and to a certain love of war, characteristic of the race. Hulot was struck with admiration as he went through the ranks asking information from Gudin, on whom he had bestowed all the friendly feeling which had formerly been allotted to Merle and Gérard. A considerable number of the townsmen were spectators of the preparations for the expedition, and were able to compare the bearing of their noisy comrades with that of a battalion of Hulot's demi-brigade. The Blues, motionless, in faultless line, and silent, waited for the orders of the commandant, whom the eyes of each soldier followed as he went from group to group. When he came up to the old officer, Corentin could not help smiling at the change in Hulot's appearance. He looked like a portrait which has lost its resemblance to the original.

"What is up?" asked Corentin of him.

"Come and fire a shot with us, and you will know," answered the commandant.

"Oh! I am not a Fougères man," replied Corentin.

"We can all see that, citizen," said Gudin; and some mocking laughter came from the neighboring groups.

"Do you think," retorted Corentin, "that there is no way of saving France but with bayonets?" and he turned his back on the laughers, and addressed himself to a woman in order to learn the purpose and destination of this expedition.

"Alas! good sir, the Chouans are already at Florigny. 'Tis said that there are more than three thousand of them, and that they are coming to take Fougères."

"Florigny!" cried Corentin, growing pale; "then, that cannot be the meeting-place! Do you mean," he went on, "Florigny on the Mayenne road?"

"There are not two Florignys," answered the woman, pointing to the road which ended at the top of the Pilgrim.

"Are you going after the Marquis of Montauran?" asked Corentin of the commandant.

"Rather," answered Hulot roughly.

"He is not at Florigny," replied Corentin. "Send your battalion and the National Guards thither, but keep some of your counter-Chouans with yourself, and wait for me."

"He is too sly to be mad," cried the commandant, as he saw Corentin stride hastily off. "'Tis certainly the king of spies."

At the same time he gave his battalion the order to march, and the Republican soldiers went silently, and without beat of drum, through the narrow suburb which leads to the Mayenne road, marking against the houses and the trees a long line of blue and red. The disguised National Guards followed them, but Hulot remained in the little square, with Gudin and a score of picked young townsmen, waiting for Corentin, whose air of mystery had excited his curiosity. Francine herself told the wary spy of the departure of Mademoiselle de Verneuil; all his suspicions at once became certainties, and he went forth to gain new light on this deservedly questionable absence. Learning from the guard at the Porte Saint Léonard that the fair stranger had passed by the Nid-aux-Crocs, Corentin ran to the walks, and, as ill-luck would have it, reached them just in time to perceive all Marie's movements. Although she had put on a gown and hood of green in order to be less conspicuous, the quick motion of her almost frenzied steps showed clearly enough through the leafless and hoar-frosted hedges, the direction of her journey.

"Ah!" cried he, "you ought to be making for Florigny, and you are going down toward the valley of Gibarry! I am but a simpleton: she has duped me. But patience! I can light my lamp by day as well as by night." And then,

having pretty nearly guessed the place of the lovers' assignation, he ran to the square at the very moment when Hulot was about to quit it and follow up his troops.

"Halt, general!" he cried to the commandant, who turned back.

In a moment Corentin had acquainted the soldier with incidents, the connecting web of which, though hid, had allowed some of its threads to appear; and Hulot, struck by the agent's shrewdness, clutched his arm briskly.

"A thousand thunders! Citizen Inquisitive, you are right! The brigands are making a feint down there! The two flying columns that I sent to beat the neighborhood between the Antrain and the Vitré roads have not come back yet, and so wesh all find in the country re-enforcements which will be useful, for the Gars is not fool enough to risk himself without his cursed screech-owls at hand. Gudin!" said he to the young Fougères man, "run and tell Captain Lebrun that he can do without me in drubbing the brigands at Florigny, and then come back in no time. You know the by-paths. I shall wait for you to hunt up the *ci-devant* and avenge the murders at the Vivetière. God's thunder! how he runs!" added he, looking at Gudin, who vanished as if by magic. "Would not Gérard have loved the boy!"

When he came back, Gudin found Hulot's little force increased by some soldiers drawn from the various guard-houses of the town. The commandant bade the young man pick out a dozen of his fellow-townsmen who had most experience in the difficult business of counterfeiting the Chouans, and ordered him to make his way by Saint Léonard's Gate, so as to take the route to the rear of the heights of Saint Sulpice facing the great valley of the Couësnon, where was the cottage of Galope-Chopine. Then he put himself at the head of the rest of the force, and left by the Porte Saint Sulpice, meaning to gain the crest of the hills where he, according to his plans, expected to meet Beau-Pied and his men. With these he intended to strengthen a cordon of sentries whose business was to watch the rocks from the Faubourg Saint Sulpice to the Nid-aux-Crocs. Corentin, confident that he had placed the fate of the Chouan chief in the hands of his most implacable enemies, went rapidly to the promenade in order to get a better view of Hulot's dispositions as a whole. It was not long before he saw Gudin's little party debouching by the Nancon dale, and following the rocks along the side of the great Conësnon Valley; while Hulot, slipping out along the castle of Fougères, climbed the dangerous path which led to the crest of the Saint Sulpice crags. In this manner the two parties were working on parallel lines.

The trees and bushes, richly arabesqued by the hoar-frost, threw over the country a white gleam, against which it was easy to see the two detachments moving like gray lines. As soon as he had arrived at the table-land on the top of the rocks, Hulot separated from his force all those soldiers who were in uniform; and Corentin saw them, under the skillful orders of the commandant, drawing up a line of perambulating sentinels, parted each from each by a suitable space; the first was to be in touch with Gudin and the last with Hulot, so that not so much as a bush could escape the bayonets of these three moving lines who were about to track down the Gars across the hills and fields.

"He is cunning, the old watch-dog!" cried Corentin, as he lost sight of the last flashes of the gun barrels amid the *ajoncs*. "The Gars's goose is cooked! If Marie had betrayed this d—d marquis, she and I should have been united by the firmest of all ties, that of disgrace. But all the same, she shall be mine!"

The twelve young men of Fougères, led by Sub-lieutenant Gudin, soon gained the slope where the Saint Sulpice crags sink down in smaller hills to the valley of Gibarry. Gudin, for his part, left the roads, and jumped lightly over the bar of the first broom-field he came to, being followed by six of his fellows; the others, by his orders, made their way into the fields toward the right, so as to beat the ground on each side of the road. Gudin

darted briskly toward an apple-tree which stood in the midst of the broom. At the rustle made by the march of the six counter-Chouans whom he led across this broom forest, trying not to disturb its frosted tufts, seven or eight men, at whose head was Beau-Pied, hid themselves behind some chestnut trees which crowned the hedge of the field. Despite the white gleam which lighted up the country, and despite their own sharp eyesight, the Fougères party did not at first perceive the others, who had sheltered themselves behind the trees.

"Hist! here they are!" said Beau-Pied, the first to raise his head, "the brigands have got in front of us; but as we have got them at the end of our guns, don't let us miss them, or, by Jove! we shan't deserve to be even the Pope's soldiers!"

However, Gudin's piercing eyes had at last noticed certain gun-barrels leveled at his little party. At the same moment, with a bitter mockery, eight deep voices cried "*Qui vive?*" and eight gunshots followed. The balls whistled round the counter-Chouans, of whom one received a wound in the arm, and another fell. The five men of Fougères who remained unhurt answered with a volley, shouting "Friends!" Then they rushed upon their supposed enemies so as to close with them before they could reload.

"We did not know we spoke so much truth!" cried the young sub-lieutenant, as he recognized the uniform and the battered hats of his own demi-brigade. "We have done like true Bretons—fought first, and asked questions afterward."

The eight soldiers stood astounded as they recognized Gudin. "Confound it, sir! Who the devil would not have taken you for brigands with your goatskins?" cried Beau-Pied mournfully.

"It is a piece of ill-luck, and nobody is to blame, since you had no notice that our counter-Chouans were going to make a sally. But what have you been doing?"

"We are hunting a dozen Chouans, sir, who are amusing themselves by breaking our backs. We have been running like poisoned rats; and what with jumping over these bars and hedges (may thunder confound them!) our legs are worn out, and we were taking a rest. I think the brigands must be now somewhere about the hut where you see the smoke rising."

"Good!" cried Gudin. "Fall back," added he to Beau-Pied and his eight men, "across the fields to the Saint Sulpice rocks, and support the line of sentries that the commandant has posted there. You must not stay with us, because you are in uniform. Odds cartridges! We are trying to get hold of the dogs, for the Gars is among them. Your comrades will tell you more than I can. File to the right, and don't pull trigger on six others of our goatskins that you may meet! You will know our counter-Chouans by their neckerchiefs, which are coiled round without a knot."

Gudin deposited his two wounded men under the apple-tree, and continued his way to Galope-Chopine's house, which Beau-Pied had just pointed out to him, and the smoke of which served as a landmark. While the young officer had thus got on the track of the Chouans by a collision common enough in this war, but which might have had more fatal results, the little detachment which Hulot himself commanded had reached on its own line of operations a point parallel to that at which Gudin had arrived on his. The old soldier, at the head of his counter-Chouans, slipped silently among the hedges with all the eagerness of a young man, and jumped the bars with sufficient agility, directing his restless eyes to all the points that commanded them, and pricking up his ears like a hunter at the least noise.

In the third field which he entered he perceived a woman, some thirty years old, busy in hoeing the soil, and working hard in a stooping posture; while a little boy, about seven or eight years old, armed with a bill-hook, was shaking rime off some *ajoncs* which had sprung up here and there, cutting them down, and piling them in heaps. At the noise which Hulot made in alighting heavily across the bar, the little gars and his mother raised their heads. Hulot naturally enough mistook the woman, young

as she was, for a crone. Premature wrinkles furrowed her forehead and neck, and she was so oddly clothed in a worn goatskin, that had it not been that her sex was indicated by a dirty yellow linen gown, Hulot would not have known whether she was man or woman, for her long black tresses were hidden under a red woolen night-cap. The rags in which the small boy was clothed, after a fashion, showed his skin through them.

"Hullo, old woman!" said Hulot in a lowered voice to her as he drew near, "where is the Gars?" At the same moment the score of counter-Chouans who followed him crossed the boundary of the field.

"Oh! to get to the Gars you must go back the way you came," answered the woman, after casting a distrusful glance on the party.

"Did I ask you the way to the suburb of the Gars at Fougères, old bag of bones?" replied Hulot roughly. "Saint Anne of Auray! Have you seen the Gars pass?"

"I do not know what you mean," said the woman, bending down to continue her work.

"D—d *garce* that you are! Do you want the Blues, who are after us, to gobble us up?" cried Hulot.

At these words the woman lifted herself up and cast another suspicious look at the counter-Chouans as she answered, "How can the Blues be after you? I saw seven or eight of them just now going back to Fougères by the road down there."

"Would not a man say that she looks like biting us?" said Hulot. "Look there, old Nanny!"

And the commandant pointed out to her, some fifty paces behind, three or four of his sentinels, whose uniforms and guns were unmistakable.

"Do you want to have our throats cut, when Marche-à-Terre has sent us to help the Gars, whom the men of Fougères are trying to catch?" he went on angrily.

"Your pardon," answered the woman; "but one is so easily deceived! What parish do you come from?" asked she.

"From Saint George!" cried two or three of the men of Fougères in Low Breton; "and we are dying of hunger!"

"Well, then, look here," said the woman; "do you see that smoke there? that is my house. If you take the paths on the right and keep up, you will get there. Perhaps you will meet my husband by the way—Galope-Chopine has got to stand sentinel to warn the Gars, for you know he is coming to our house to-day," added she with pride.

"Thanks, good woman," answered Hulot. "Forward, men! By God's thunder!" added he, speaking to his followers, "we have got him!"

At these words the detachment, breaking into a run, followed the commandant, who plunged into the path pointed out to him. When she heard the self-styled Chouan's by no means Catholic imprecation, Galope-Chopine's wife turned pale. She looked at the gaiters and goatskins of the Fougères youth, sat down on the ground, clasped her child in her arms, and said:

"The Holy Virgin of Auray and the blessed Saint Labre have mercy upon us! I do not believe that they are our folk: their shoes have no nails! Run by the lower road to warn your father: his head is at stake!" said she to the little boy, who disappeared like a fawn through the broom and the *ajoncs*.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil, however, had not met on her way any of the parties of Blues or Chouans who were hunting each other in the maze of fields that lay round Galope-Chopine's cottage. When she saw a bluish column rising from the half-shattered chimney of the wretched dwelling, her heart underwent one of those violent palpitations, the quick and sounding throbs of which seem to surge up to the throat. She stopped, leaned her hand against a tree-branch, and stared at the smoke which was to be a beacon at once to the friends and enemies of the young chief. Never had she felt such overpowering emotion.

"Oh!" she said to herself with a sort

of despair, "I love him too much! It may be I shall lose command of myself to-day!"

Suddenly she crossed the space which separated her from the cottage, and found herself in the yard, the mud of which had been hardened by the frost. The great dog once more flew at her, barking; but at a single word pronounced by Galope-Chopine, he held his tongue and wagged his tail. As she entered the cabin, Mademoiselle de Verneuil threw into it an all-embracing glance. The marquis was not there; and Marie breathed more freely. She observed with pleasure that the Chouan had exerted himself to restore some cleanliness to the dirty single chamber of his lair. Galope-Chopine grasped his duck-gun, bowed silently to his guest, and went out with his dog. She followed him to the doorstep, and saw him departing by the path which went to the right of his hut, and the entrance of which was guarded by a large rotten tree, which served as an *échalier*, though one almost in ruins. Thence she could perceive a range of fields, the bars of which showed like a vista of gates, for the trees and hedges, stripped bare, allowed full view of the least details of the landscape.

When Galope-Chopine's broad hat had suddenly disappeared, Mademoiselle de Verneuil turned to the left to look for the church of Fougères, but the outhouse hid it from her wholly. Then she cast her eyes on the Couësnon Valley, lying before them like a huge sheet of muslin, whose whiteness dulled yet further a sky gray-tinted and loaded with snow. It was one of those days when nature seemed speechless, and when the atmosphere sucks up all noises. Thus, though the Blues and their counter-Chouans were marching on the hut in three lines, forming a triangle, which they contracted as they came nearer, the silence was so profound that Mademoiselle de Verneuil felt oppressed by surroundings which added to her mental anguish a kind of physical sadness. There was ill-fortune in the air. At last, at the point where a little curtain of wood terminated the vista of *échaliers*, she saw a young man leaping the barriers like a squirrel, and running with astonishing speed.

"'Tis he!" she said to herself.

The Gars, dressed plainly like a Chouan, carried his blunderbuss slung behind his goatskin, and, but for the elegance of his movements, would have been unrecognizable. Marie retired hurriedly into the cabin, in obedience to one of those instinctive resolves which are as little explicable as fear. But it was not long before the young chief stood only a step from her, in front of the chimney, where burned a clear and crackling fire. Both found themselves speechless, and dreaded to look at each other, or even to move. One hope united their thoughts, one doubt parted them. It was anguish and rapture at once.

"Sir!" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil at last, in a broken voice, "anxiety for your safety alone has brought me hither."

"My safety?" he asked bitterly.

"Yes!" she answered. "So long as I stay at Fougères your life is in danger; and I love you too well not to depart this evening. Therefore seek me no more."

"Depart, beloved angel? I will follow you!"

"Follow me? Can you think of such a thing? And the Blues?"

"Why, dearest Marie, what have the Blues to do with our love?"

"It seems to me difficult for you to stay in France near me, and more difficult still for you to leave it with me."

"Is there such a thing as the impossible to a good lover?"

"Yes! I believe that everything is possible. Had *I* not courage enough to give you up for your own sake?"

"What! You gave yourself to a horrible creature whom you did not love, and you will not grant happiness to a man who adores you, whose whole life you fill, who swears to you to be forever only yours? Listen, Marie: do you love me?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, then, be mine!"

"Have you forgotten that I have resumed the base part of a courtesan, and

that it is *you* who must be mine? If I have determined to fly, it is that I may not let the contempt which I may incur fall on your head. Were it not for this fear I might—"

"But if I fear nothing?'

"Who will guarantee me that? I am mistrustful; and in my situation, who would not be so? If the love that we inspire be not lasting, at least it should be complete, so as to make us support the world's injustice with joy. What have you done for me? You desire me. Do you think *that* exalts you very high above those who have seen me before? Have you risked your Chouans for an hour of rapture as carelessly as I dismissed the remembrance of the massacred Blues when all was lost for me? Suppose I bade you renounce all your principles, all your hopes, your king who stands in my way, and who very likely will make mock of you when you have laid down your life for him, while I would die for you with a sacred devotion? Suppose I would have you send your submission to the First Consul, so that you might be able to follow me to Paris? Suppose I insisted that we should go to America to live, far from a world where all is vanity, that I might know whether you really love me for myself as at this moment I love you? In one word, suppose I tried to make you fall to my level instead of raising myself to yours, what would you do?"

"Hush, Marie! Do not slander yourself. Poor child, I have found you out. Even as my first desire transformed itself into passion, so my passion has transformed itself into love. I know, dearest soul of my soul, that you are noble as your name, great as you are beautiful. And I myself am noble enough and feel myself great enough to force the world to receive you. Is it because I foresee unheard-of and incessant delights with you? Is it because I seem to recognize in your soul that precious quality which keeps us ever constant to one woman? I know not the cause; but my love is boundless, and I feel that I cannot live without you—that my life, if you were not near me, would be full of mere disgust."

"What do you mean by 'near me?'"

"Oh, Marie! will you not understand your Alphonse?"

"Ah! you think you are paying me a great compliment in offering me your hand and name?" she said, with affected scorn, but eying the marquis closely to catch his slightest thoughts. "How do you know whether you would love me in six months' time? And if you did not, what would become of me? No, no! a mistress is the only woman who is certain of the affection which a man shows her; she has no need to seek such pitiful allies as duty, law, society, the interests of children; and if her power lasts, she finds in it solace and happiness which make the greatest vexations of life endurable. To be your wife, at the risk of one day being a burden to you? To such a fear I would prefer a love fleeting, but true while it lasted, though death and ruin were to come after it. Yes! I could well, and even better than another, be a virtuous mother, a devoted wife. But, in order that such sentiments may be kept up in a woman's heart, a man must not marry her in a mere gust of passion. Besides, can I tell myself whether I shall care for you to-morrow? No! I will not bring a curse on you; I will leave Brittany," said she, perceiving an air of irresolution in his looks. "I will return to Paris, and you will not come to seek me there—"

"Well, then! the day after to-morrow, if in the morning you see smoke on the rocks of Saint Sulpice, that evening I shall be at your house as lover, as husband, whichever you will. I shall have put all to the touch!"

"Then, Alphonse, you really love me," she cried with transport, "that you risk your life thus before you give it to me?"

He answered not, but looked at her. Her eyes fell; but he read on the passionate countenance of his mistress a madness equal to his own, and he held out his arms to her. A kind of frenzy seized Marie. She was on the point of falling in languishment on the marquis's breast, with

a mind made up to complete surrender, so as out of this fault to forge the greatest of blessings, and to stake her whole future, which, if she came out conqueror from this last test, she would make more than ever certain. But her head had scarcely rested on her lover's shoulder, when a slight noise was heard outside.

She tore herself from his arms as if suddenly waked from sleep, and darted from the cabin. Only then could she recover a little coolness and think of her position.

"Perhaps he would have taken me and laughed at me afterward!" thought she. "Could I believe that, I would kill him! But not yet!" she went on, as she caught sight of Beau-Pied, to whom she made a sign, which the soldier perfectly well understood.

The poor fellow turned on his heel, pretending to have seen nothing, and Mademoiselle de Verneuil suddenly re-entered the room, begging the young chief to observe the deepest silence by pressing the first finger of her right hand on her lips.

"They are there!" she said, in a stifled voice of terror.

"Who?"

"The Blues!"

"Ah! I will not die at least without having—"

"Yes, take it—"

He seized her cold and unresisting form, and gathered from her lips a kiss full both of horror and delight, for it might well be at once the first and the last. Then they went together to the door-step, putting their heads in such a posture as to see all without being seen. The marquis perceived Gudin at the head of a dozen men, holding the foot of the Couësnon Valley. He turned toward the series of *échaliers*, but the great rotten tree-trunk was guarded by seven soldiers. He climbed the cider-butt, and drove out the shingled roof so as to be able to jump on the knoll; but he quickly drew his head back from the hole he had made, for Hulot was on the heights, cutting off the road to Fougères. For a moment he stared at his mistress, who uttered a cry of despair as she heard the tramp of the three detachments all round the house.

"Go out first," he said, "you will save me."

As she heard these words, to her sublime, she placed herself, full of happiness, in front of the door, while the marquis cocked his blunderbuss. After carefully calculating the distance between the cottage door and the great tree-trunk, the Gars flung himself upon the seven Blues, sent a hail of slugs upon them from his piece, and forced his way through their midst. The three parties hurried down to the barrier which the chief had leaped, and saw him running across the field with incredible speed.

"Fire! fire! A thousand devils! are you Frenchmen? Fire, dogs!" cried Hulot in a voice of thunder.

As he shouted these words from the top of the knoll, his men and Gudin's delivered a general volley, luckily ill-aimed. The marquis had already reached the barrier at the end of the first field; but just as he passed into the second he was nearly caught by Gudin, who had rushed furiously after him. Hearing this formidable enemy a few steps behind, the Gars redoubled his speed. Nevertheless, Gudin and he reached the bar almost at the same moment; but Montauran hurled his blunderbuss with such address at Gudin's head, that he hit him and stopped his career for a moment. It is impossible to depict the anxiety of Marie, or the interest which Hulot and his men showed at this spectacle. All unconsciously mimicked the gestures of the two runners. The Gars and Gudin had reached, almost together, the curtain, whitened with hoar-frost, which the little wood formed, when suddenly the Republican officer started back and sheltered himself behind an apple-tree. A score of Chouans, who had not fired before for fear of killing their chief, now showed themselves, and riddled the tree with bullets.

Then all Hulot's little force set off at a run to rescue Gudin, who, finding himself weaponless, retired from apple-tree to apple-tree, taking for his runs the intervals when the King's Huntsmen were

reloading. His danger did not last long, for the counter-Chouans and Blues, Hulot at their head, came up to support the young officer at the spot where the marquis had thrown away his blunderbuss. Just then Gudin saw his foe sitting exhausted under one of the trees of the clump, and, leaving his comrades to exchange shots with the Chouans, who were ensconced behind the hedge at the side of the field, he outflanked these, and made for the marquis with the eagerness of a wild beast. When they saw this movement, the King's Huntsmen uttered hideous yells to warn their chief, and then, having fired on the counter-Chouans with poachers' luck, they tried to hold their ground against them. But the Blues valiantly stormed the hedge which formed the enemy's rampart, and exacted a bloody vengeance.

Then the Chouans took to the road bordering the field in the inclosure of which this scene had passed, and seized the heights which Hulot had made the mistake of abandoning. Before the Blues had had time to collect their ideas, the Chouans had intrenched themselves in the broken crests of the rocks, under cover of which they could, without exposing themselves, fire on Hulot's men if these latter showed signs of coming to attack them. While the commandant with some soldiers went slowly toward the little wood to look for Gudin, the Fougèrese stayed behind to strip the dead Chouans and dispatch the living—for in this hideous war neither party made prisoners.

The marquis once in safety, Chouans and Blues alike recognized the strength of their respective positions and the uselessness of continuing the strife. Both therefore thought only of withdrawing.

"If I lose this young fellow," cried Hulot, scanning the wood carefully, "I will never make another friend."

"Ah!" said one of the young men of Fougères, who was busy stripping the dead, "here is a bird with yellow feathers!"

And he showed his comrades a purse full of gold-pieces, which he had just found in the pocket of a stout man dressed in black.

"But what have we here?" said another, drawing a breviary from the dead man's overcoat. "Why, 'tis holy ware! He is a priest!" cried he, throwing the volume down.

"This thief has turned bankrupt on our hands!" said a third, finding only two crowns of six francs in the pockets of a Chouan whom he was stripping.

"Yes; but he has a capital pair of shoes," answered a soldier, making as though to take them.

"You shall have them if they fall to your share," replied one of the Fougèrese, plucking them from the dead man's feet, and throwing them on the pile of goods already heaped together.

A fourth counter-Chouan acted as receiver of the coin, with a view to sharing it out when all the men of the expedition had come together. When Hulot came back with the young officer, whose last attempt to come up with the Gars had been equally dangerous and futile, he found a score of his soldiers and some thirty counter-Chouans standing round eleven dead enemies, whose bodies had been thrown into a furrow drawn along the foot of the hedge.

"Soldiers!" cried the commandant in a stern voice, "I forbid you to share these rags. Fall in, and that in less than no time!"

"Commandant," said a soldier to Hulot, pointing to his own shoes, at whose tips his five bare toes were visible, "all right about the money; but those shoes, commandant?" added he, indicating with his musket-butt the pair of hobnails, "those shoes would fit me like a glove."

"So, you want English shoes on your feet?" answered Hulot.

"But," said one of the Fougèrese, respectfully enough, "we have always, since the war begun, shared the booty."

"I do not interfere with you other fellows," said Hulot, interrupting him roughly; "follow your customs."

"Here, Gudin, here is a purse which is not badly stocked with louis. You have had hard work; your chief will not mind

your taking it," said one of his old comrades to the young officer.

Hulot looked askance at Gudin, and saw his face grow pale.

"'Tis my uncle's purse," cried the young man; and, dead tired as he was, he walked toward the heap of corpses. The first that met his eyes was, in fact, his uncle's; but he had hardly caught sight of the ruddy face furrowed with bluish streaks, the stiffened arms, and the wound which the gunshot had made, than he uttered a stifled cry, and said, "Let us march, commandant!"

The troop of Blues set off, Hulot lending his arm to support his young friend.

"God's thunder! you will get over that," said the old soldier.

"But he is dead!" replied Gudin. "Dead! He was my only relation; and though he cursed me, he loved me. Had the king come back, the whole country might have clamored for my head, but the old boy would have hid me under his cassock."

"The foolish fellow!" said the National Guards who had stayed behind to share the spoils. "The old boy was rich; and things being so, he could not have had time to make a will to cut Gudin off." And when the division was made the counter-Chouans caught up the little force of Blues and followed it at some interval.

As night fell, terrible anxiety came upon Galope-Chopine's hut, where hitherto life had passed in the most careless simplicity. Barbette and her little boy, carrying on their backs, the one a heavy load of *ajoncs*, the other a supply of grass for the cattle, returned at the usual hour of the family evening meal. When they entered the house, mother and son looked in vain for Galope-Chopine; and never had the wretched chamber seemed to them so large as now in its emptiness. The fireless hearth, the darkness, the silence, all gave them a foreboding of misfortune. When night came, Barbette busied herself in lighting a bright fire and two *oribus*—the name given to candles of resin in the district from the shores of Armorica to the Upper Loire, and still used in the Vendôme country districts this side of Amboise.

She went through these preparations with the slowness naturally affecting action when it is dominated by some deep feeling. She listened for the smallest noise; but though often deceived by the whistling squalls of wind, she always returned sadly from her journeys to the door of her wretched hut. She cleaned two pitchers, filled them with cider, and set them on the long walnut table. Again and again she gazed at the boy, who was watching the baking of the buckwheat cakes, but without being able to speak to him. For a moment the little boy's eyes rested on the two nails which served as supports to his father's duck-gun, and Barbette shuddered as they both saw that the place was empty. The silence was broken only by the lowing of the cows or by the steady drip of the cider drops from the cask-spile. The poor woman sighed as she got ready in three platters of brown earthenware a sort of soup composed of milk, cakes cut up small, and boiled chestnuts.

"They fought in the field that belongs to the Beraudière," said the little boy.

"Go and look there," answered his mother.

The boy ran thither, perceived by the moonlight the heap of dead, found that his father was not among them, and came back whistling cheerfully, for he had picked up some five-franc pieces which had been trodden under foot by the victors, and forgotten in the mud. He found his mother sitting on a stool at the fireside, and busy spinning hemp. He shook his head to Barbette, who hardly dared believe in any good news; and then, ten o'clock having struck from Saint Léonard's, the child went to bed, after muttering a prayer to the Holy Virgin of Auray. At daybreak, Barbette, who had not slept, uttered a cry of joy as she heard, echoing afar off, a sound of heavy hobnailed shoes which she knew; and soon Galope-Chopine showed his sullen face.

"Thanks to Saint Labre, to whom I have promised a fine candle, the Gars is

safe! Do not forget that we owe the saint three candles now."

Then Galope-Chopine seized a pitcher and drained the whole of its contents without drawing breath. When his wife had served up his soup and had relieved him of his duck-gun, and when he had sat down on the walnut bench, he said, drawing closer to the fire:

"How did the Blues and the counter-Chouans get here? The fighting was at Florigny. What devil can have told them that the Gars was at our house? for nobody but himself, his fair wench, and ourselves knew it."

The woman grew pale. "The counter-Chouans persuaded me that they were gars of Saint George," said she, trembling; "and it was I who told them where the Gars was."

Galope-Chopine's face blanched in his turn, and he left his plate on the table-edge.

"I sent the child to tell you," went on Barbette in her terror; "but he did not meet you."

The Chouan rose and struck his wife so fierce a blow that she fell half dead on the bed. "Accursed wench," he said, "you have killed me!" Then, seized with fear, he caught his wife in his arms. "Barbette!" he cried; "Barbette! Holy Virgin! my hand was too heavy!"

"Do you think," she said, opening her eyes, "that Marche-à-Terre will come to know of it?"

"The Gars," answered the Chouan, "has given orders to inquire whence the treachery came."

"But did he tell Marche-à-Terre?"

"Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre were at Florigny."

Barbette breathed more freely. "If they touch a hair of your head," said she, "I will rinse their glasses with vinegar!"

"Ah! my appetite is gone!" cried Galope-Chopine sadly. His wife pushed another full jug in front of him, but he did not even notice it; and two great tears furrowed Barbette's cheek, moistening the wrinkles of her withered face.

"Listen, wife: You must pile some fagots to-morrow morning on the Saint Sulpice rocks, to the right of Saint Léonard's, and set fire to them. 'Tis the signal arranged between the Gars and the old rector of Saint George, who is coming to say mass for him."

"Is he going to Fougères, then?"

"Yes, to his fair wench. I have got some running about to do to-day by reason of it. I think he is going to marry her and carry her off, for he bade me go and hire horses and relay them on the Saint-Malo road."

Thereupon the weary Galope-Chopine went to bed for some hours; and then he set about his errands. The next morning he came home, after having punctually discharged the commissions with which the marquis had intrusted him. When he learned that Marche-à-Terre and Pille-Miche had not appeared, he quieted the fears of his wife, who set out, almost reassured, for the rocks of Saint Sulpice, where the day before she had prepared, on the hummock facing Saint Léonard's, some fagots covered with hoar-frost. She led by the hand her little boy, who carried some fire in a broken sabot. Hardly had his wife and child disappeared round the roof of the shed, when Galope-Chopine heard two men leaping over the last of the series of barriers, and little by little he saw, through a fog which was pretty thick, angular shapes, looking like uncertain shadows.

"'Tis Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre!" he said to himself with a start. The two Chouans, who had now reached the little courtyard, showed their dark faces, resembling, under their great, shabby hats, the figures that engravers put into landscapes.

"Good-day, Galope-Chopine!" said Marche-à-Terre gravely.

"Good-day, Master Marche-à-Terre," humbly replied Barbette's husband. "Will you come in and drink a pitcher or two? There is cold cake and fresh-made butter."

"We shall not refuse, cousin," said Pille-Miche; and the two Chouans entered.

This overture had nothing in it alarming to Galope-Chopine, who bustled about to fill three pitchers at his great cask, while Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre, seated at each side of the long table on the glistening benches, cut the bannocks for themselves, and spread them with luscious yellow butter, which shed little bubbles of milk under the knife. Galope-Chopine set the foam-crowned pitchers full of cider before his guests, and the three Chouans began to eat; but from time to time the host cast sidelong glances on Marche-à-Terre, eager to satisfy his thirst.

"Give me your snuff-box," said Marche-à-Terre to Pille-Miche; and after sharply shaking several pinches into the hollow of his hand, the Breton took his tobacco like a man who wished to wind himself up for some serious business.

"'Tis cold," said Pille-Miche, rising to go and shut the upper part of the door.

The daylight, darkened by the fog, had no further access to the room than by the little window, and lighted but feebly the table and the two benches; but the fire shed its ruddy glow over them. At the same moment, Galope-Chopine, who had finished filling his guests' jugs a second time, set these before them. But they refused to drink, threw down their flapping hats, and suddenly assumed a solemn air. Their gestures and the inquiring looks they cast at one another made Galope-Chopine shudder, and the red woolen caps which were on their heads seemed to him as though they were blood.

"Bring us your hatchet," said Marche-à-Terre.

"But, Master Marche-à-Terre, what do you want it for?"

"Come, cousin," said Pille-Miche, putting up the mull which Marche-à-Terre handed to him, "you know well enough —you are sentenced." And the two Chouans rose together, clutching their rifles.

"Master Marche-à-Terre, I have not said a word about the Gars—"

"I tell you to fetch your hatchet," answered the Chouan.

The wretched Galope-Chopine stumbled against the rough wood-work of his child's bed, and three five-franc pieces fell on the floor. Pille-Miche picked them up.

"Aha! the Blues have given you new coin," cried Marche-à-Terre.

"'Tis as true as that Saint Labre's image is there," replied Galope-Chopine, "that I said *nothing*. Barbette mistook the counter-Chouans for the gars of Saint George's; that is all."

"Why do you talk about business to your wife?" answered Marche-à-Terre savagely.

"Besides, cousin, we are not asking for explanations, but for your hatchet. You are sentenced." And at a sign from his comrade, Pille-Miche helped him to seize the victim. When he found himself in the two Chouans' grasp, Galope-Chopine lost all his fortitude, fell on his knees, and raised despairing hands toward his two executioners.

"My good friends! my cousin! what is to become of my little boy?"

"I will take care of him," said Marche-à-Terre.

"Dear comrades," said Galope-Chopine, whose face had become of a ghastly whiteness, "I am not ready to die. Will you let me depart without confessing? You have the right to take my life, but not to make me forfeit eternal happiness."

"'Tis true!" said Marche-à-Terre, looking at Pille-Miche; and the two Chouans remained for a moment in the greatest perplexity, unable to decide this case of conscience. Galope-Chopine listened for the least rustle that the wind made, as if he still kept up some hope. The sound of the cider dripping regularly from the cask made him cast a mechanical look at the barrel and give a melancholy sigh. Suddenly Pille-Miche took his victim by the arm, drew him into the corner, and said:

"Confess all your sins to me. I will tell them over to a priest of the true church; he shall give me absolution; and if there be penance to do, I will do it for you."

Galope-Chopine obtained some respite by his manner of acknowledging his

transgressions; but despite the length and details of the crimes, he came at last to the end of the list.

"Alas!" said he in conclusion, "after all, cousin, since I am addressing you as a confessor, I protest to you by the holy name of God that I have nothing to reproach myself with, except having buttered my bread too much here and there; and I call Saint Labre, who is over the chimney, to witness that I said nothing about the Gars. No, my good friends, I am no traitor!"

"Go to, cousin; 'tis well! Get up: you can arrange all that with the good God at one time or another."

"But let me say one little good-by to Barbe—"

"Come," answered Marche-à-Terre, "if you wish us not to think worse of you than is needful, behave like a Breton, and make a clean end!"

The two Chousans once more seized Galope-Chopine and stretched him on the bench, where he gave no other sign of resistance than the convulsive movements of mere animal instinct. At the last he uttered some smothered shrieks, which ceased at the moment that the heavy thud of the ax was heard. The head was severed at a single blow.

Marche-à-Terre took it by a tuft of hair, left the room, and, after searching, found a stout nail in the clumsy frame-work of the door, round which he twisted the hair he held, and left the bloody head hanging there, without even closing the eyes. Then the two Chouans washed their hands without the least hurry in a great pan full of water, took up their hats and their rifles, and clambered over the barrier, whistling the air of the ballad of "The Captain." * At the end of the field Pille-Miche shouted in a husky voice some stanzas chosen by chance from this simple song, the rustic strains of which were carried afar off by the wind:

"At the first town where they did alight,
Her lover dressed her in satin white.

"At the second town, her lover bold
He dressed her in silver and eke in gold.

"So fair she was that their stuff they lent
To do her grace through the regiment."

The tune grew slowly indistinct as the two Chouans retired; but the silence of the country was so deep that some notes reached the ear of Barbette, who was coming home, her child in her hand. So popular is this song in the west of France, that a peasant woman never hears it unmoved; and thus Barbette unconsciously struck up the first verses of the ballad:

"Come to the war, come, fairest May;
Come, for we must no longer stay.

"Captain brave, take thou no care,
Not for thee is my daughter fair.

"Neither on land, nor yet on sea;
Shall aught but treason give her to thee.

"The father strips his girl, and he
Takes her and flings her into the sea.

"But wiser, I trow, was the captain stout;
He swims, and fetches his lady out.

"Come to the war, etc."

At the same moment at which Barbette found herself catching up the ballad at the point where Pille-Miche had begun it, she reached her own courtyard; her tongue froze to her mouth, she stood motionless, and a loud shriek, suddenly checked, issued from her gaping lips.

"What is the matter, dear mother?" asked the child.

"Go by yourself," muttered Barbette, drawing her hand from his, and pushing him forward with strange roughness. "You are fatherless and motherless now!"

The child rubbed his shoulder as he cried, saw the head nailed on the door, and his innocent countenance speechlessly kept the nervous twitch which tears give

* This famous folk-song has been Englished by Mr. Swinburne in "May Janet," and I think by others. It might have been wiser to borrow a version from one of these. But silk on homespun is bad heraldry. The following is at any rate pretty close, and in verse suiting its neighbor prose. If the third stanza does not seem clear, I can only say that no one can be very sure what *On lui tendait les voiles Dans tout le régiment* does mean.

to the features. He opened his eyes wide and gazed long at his father's head, with a stolid and passionless expression, till his face, brutalized by ignorance, changed to the exhibition of a kind of savage curiosity. Suddenly Barbette caught her child's hand once more, squeezed it fiercely, and drew him with rapid steps toward the house. As Pille-Miche and Marche-à-Terre were stretching Galope-Chopine on the bench, one of his shoes had fallen off under his neck in such a fashion that it was filled with his blood; and this was the first object that the widow saw.

"Take your sabot off!" said the mother to the son. "Put your foot in there. 'Tis well! And now," said she in a hollow voice, "remember always this shoe of your father's! Never put shoe on your own foot without thinking of that which was full of blood shed by the *Chuins*—and kill the *Chuins!*"

As she spoke, she shook her head with so spasmodic a movement that the tresses of her black hair fell back on her neck, and gave a sinister look to her face.

"I call Saint Labre to witness," she went on, "that I devote you to the Blues. You shall be a soldier that you may avenge your father. Kill the *Chuins!* Kill them, and do as I do! Ha! they have taken my husband's head; I will give the head of the Gars to the Blues!"

She made one spring to the bed-head, took a little bag of money from a hiding-place, caught once more the hand of her astonished son, and dragged him off fiercely without giving him time to replace his sabot. They both walked rapidly toward Fougères without turning either of their heads to the hut they were leaving. When they arrived at the crest of the crags of Saint Sulpice, Barbette stirred the fagot-fire, and the child helped to heap it with green broom-shoots covered with rime, so that the smoke might be thicker.

"That will last longer than your father's life, than mine, or than the Gars!" said Barbette to her boy, pointing savagely to the fire.

At the same moment as that at which Galope-Chopine's widow and his son with the bloody foot were watching the eddying of the smoke with a gloomy air of vengeance and curiosity, Mademoiselle de Verneuil had her eyes fixed on the same rock, endeavoring, but in vain, to discover the marquis's promised signal. The fog, which had gradually thickened, buried the whole country under a veil whose tints of gray hid even those parts of the landscape which were nearest to the town. She looked by turns, with an anxiety which did not lack sweetness, to the rocks, the castle, the buildings which seemed in the fog like patches of fog blacker still. Close to her window some trees stood out of the blue-gray background like madrepores of which the sea gives a glimpse when it is calm. The sun communicated to the sky the dull tint of tarnished silver, while its rays tinted with dubious red the naked branches of the trees, on which some belated leaves still hung. But Marie's soul was too delightfully agitated for her to see any evil omens in the spectacle, out of harmony, as it was, with the joy on which she was banqueting in anticipation. During the last two days her ideas had altered strangely. The ferocity, the disorderly bursts of her passion, had slowly undergone the influence of that equable warmth which true love communicates to life.

The certainty of being loved—a certainty after which she had quested through so many dangers—had produced in her the desire of returning to those conventions of society which sanction happiness, and which she had herself only abandoned in despair. A mere moment of love seemed to her a futility. And then she saw herself suddenly restored from the social depths, where she had been plunged by misfortune, to the exalted rank in which for a brief space her father had placed her. Her vanity, which had been stifled under the cruel changes of a passion by turns fortunate and slighted, woke afresh, and showed her all the advantages of a high position. Born, as she had been, to be "her ladyship," would not the effect of marrying Montauran be for her action and life in the sphere which was her own? After having known the chances of a

wholly adventurous life, she could, better than another woman, appreciate the greatness of the feelings which lie at the root of the family relation. Nor would marriage, motherhood, and the cares of both be for her so much a task as a rest. She loved the calm and virtuous life, a glimpse of which opened across this latest storm, with the same feeling which makes a woman virtuous to satiety cast longing looks on an illicit passion.

"Perhaps," she said, as she came back from the window without having seen fire on the rocks of Saint Sulpice, "I have trifled with him not a little? But have I not thus come to know how much I was loved? Francine! 'tis no more a dream! This night I shall be Marquise de Montauran! What have I done to deserve such complete happiness? Oh! I love him; and love alone can be the price of love. Yet God, no doubt, deigns to reward me for having kept my heart warm in spite of so many miseries, and to make me forget my sufferings; for you know, child, I have suffered much!"

"To-night, Marie? You Marquise de Montauran? For my part, till it is actually true, I shall think I dream. Who told him all your real nature?"

"Why, dear child, he has not only fine eyes, but a soul too! If you had seen him, as I have, in the midst of danger! Ah! he must know how to love well, he is so brave!"

"If you love him so much, why do you allow him to come to Fougères?"

"Had we a moment to talk together when they took us by surprise? Besides, is it not a proof of his love? And can one ever have enough of that? Meanwhile, do my hair."

But she herself, with electric movements, disarranged a hundred times the successful arrangements of her headdress, mingling thoughts which were still stormy with the cares of a coquette. While adding a fresh wave to her hair, or making its tresses more glossy, she kept asking herself, with remains of mistrust, whether the marquis was not deceiving her; and then she concluded that such trickery would be inexplicable, since he exposed himself boldly to immediate vengeance by coming to seek her at Fougères. As she studied cunningly at her glass the effects of a sidelong glance, of a smile, of a slight contraction of the forehead, of an attitude of displeasure, of love, or of disdain, she was still seeking some woman's wile to test the young chief's heart up to the very last moment.

"You are right, Francine!" she said. "I would, like you, that the marriage were over. This day is the last of my days of cloud—it is big either with my death or with our happiness. This fog is hateful," she added, looking over toward the still mist-wrapped summits of Saint Sulpice. Then she set to work to arrange the silk and muslin curtains which decked the window, amusing herself with intercepting the light, so as to produce in the apartment a voluptuous clear-obscure.

"Francine," said she, "take these toys which encumber the chimney-piece away, and leave nothing there but the clock and the two Dresden vases, in which I will myself arrange the winter flowers that Corentin found for me. Let all the chairs go out; I will have nothing here but the sofa and one armchair. When you have done, child, you shall sweep the carpet, so as to bring out the color of it; and then you shall put candles into the chimney sconces and the candlesticks.

Marie gazed long and attentively at the old tapestry which covered the walls of the room. Led by her native taste, she succeeded in finding, amid the warp, bright shades of such tints as might establish connection between this old-world decoration and the furniture and accessories of the boudoir, either by harmony of colors or by attractive contrasts. The same principle guided her in arranging the flowers with which she filled the twisted vases that adorned the room. The sofa was placed near the fire. At each side of the bed, which stood by the wall parallel to that where the fireplace was, she put, on two little gilt tables, great Dresden vases full of foliage and flowers which exhaled the sweetest perfumes. She shivered more than once as she arranged the sweeping drapery of

green damask that overhung the bed, and as she studied the curving lines of the flowered coverlet wherewith she hid the bed itself. Preparations of this kind always have an indefinable, secret joy, and bring with them so delightful a provocative that ofttimes in the midst of such provision of delight a woman forgets all her doubts, as Mademoiselle de Verneuil was then forgetting hers.

Is there not a kind of religion in this abundant care taken for a beloved object who is not there to see it or reward it, but who is to pay for it later with the smile of approbation, which graceful preparations of this kind, always so well understood, obtain? Then, so to speak, do women yield themselves up beforehand to love; and there is not one who does not say to herself, as Mademoiselle de Verneuil thought, "To-night how happy I shall be!" The most innocent of them at these times inscribes this sweet hope in the innermost folds of muslin or of silk, and then the harmony which she establishes around her insensibly stamps all things with a love-breathing look. In the center of this voluptuous atmosphere, things become for her living beings, witnesses; and already she transforms them into accomplices of her coming joys. At each movement, at each thought, she is bold to rob the future. Soon she waits no more, she hopes no more, but she finds fault with silence, and the least noise is challenged to give her an omen, till at last doubt comes and places its crooked claws on her heart. She burns, she is agitated, she feels herself tortured by thoughts which exert themselves like purely physical forces; by turns she triumphs and is martyred, after a fashion which, but for the hope of joy, she could not endure.

Twenty times had Mademoiselle de Verneuil lifted the curtains in hopes of seeing a pillar of smoke rising above the rocks; but the fog seemed to grow grayer and grayer each moment, and in these gray tints her fancy at last showed her sinister omen. Finally, in a moment of impatience, she dropped the curtain, assuring herself that she would come and lift it no more. She looked discontentedly at the room into which she had breathed a soul and a voice, and asked herself whether it would all be in vain. The thought recalled her to her arrangements.

"Little one," she said to Francine, drawing her into a dressing-room close to her own, and lighted by a round window looking upon the dark corner where the town ramparts join the rocks of the promenade, "put this right, and let all be in order. As for the drawing-room, you can leave it untidy if you like," she added, accompanying her words by one of those smiles which women reserve for their intimates, and the piquant delicacy of which men can never know.

"Ah, how beautiful you are!" said the little Breton girl.

"Why, fools that we all are! is not a lover always our greatest adornment?"

Francine left her lying languidly on the ottoman, and withdrew step by step, guessing that whether she were loved or not, her mistress would never give up Montauran.

"Are you sure of what you are telling me, old woman?" said Hulot to Barbette, who had recognized him as she entered Fougères.

"Have you got eyes? Then, my good sir, look at the rocks of Saint Sulpice—there, to the right of Saint Léonard!"

Corentin turned his eyes toward the summit in the direction in which Barbette's finger pointed; and as the fog began to lift, he was able to see clearly enough the pillar of white smoke of which Galope-Chopine's widow had spoken.

"But when will he come? eh, old woman? Will it be at even, or at night?"

"Good sir," answered Barbette, "I know nothing of that."

"Why do you betray your own side?" said Hulot quickly, after drawing the peasant woman some steps away from Corentin.

"Ah! my lord general, look at my boy's foot! Well! it is dyed in the blood of my husband, killed by the *Chuins*, saving your reverence, like a calf, to punish him for the word or two you got out of

me the day before yesterday when I was at work in the field. Take my boy, since you have deprived him of father and mother; but make him a true Blue, good sir! and let him kill many *Chuins*. There are two hundred crowns; keep them for him: if he is careful, he should go far with them, since his father took twelve years to get them together."

Hulot stared with wonder at the pale and wrinkled peasant woman, whose eyes were tearless.

"But, mother," said he, "how about yourself? What is to become of you? It would be better for you to keep this money."

"For me?" she said, sadly, shaking her head; "I have no more need of anything. You might stow me away in the innermost corner of Melusine's tower," and she pointed to one of the castle turrets, "but the *Chuins* would find the way to come and kill me."

She kissed her boy with an expression of gloomy sorrow, gazed at him, shed a tear or two, gazed at him once more, and disappeared.

"Commandant," said Corentin, "this is one of those opportunities to profit by which needs rather two good heads than one. We know all, and we know nothing. To surround Mademoiselle de Verneuil's house at this moment would be to set her against us; and you, I, your counter-Chouans, and your two battalions all put together, are not men enough to fight against this girl if she takes it into her head to save her *ci-devant*. The fellow is a courtier, and therefore wary; he is a young man, and a stout-hearted one. We shall never be able to catch him at his entry into Fougères. Besides, he is very likely here already. Are we to search the houses? That would be futile; for it tells you nothing, it gives the alarm, and it disquiets the townsfolk—"

"I am going," said Hulot, out of temper, "to order the sentinel on guard at Saint Léonard to lengthen his beat by three paces, so that he will come in front of Mademoiselle de Verneuil's house. I shall arrange a signal with each sentry; I shall take up my own post at the guard-house, and when the entrance of any young man is reported to me I shall take a corporal with four men, and—"

"And," said Corentin, interrupting the eager soldier, "what if the young man is not the marquis? if the marquis does not enter by the gate? if he is already with Mademoiselle de Verneuil? if—if—?"

And with this Corentin looked at the commandant with an air of superiority which was so humiliating that the old warrior cried out, "A thousand thunders! go about your own business, citizen of hell! What have I to do with all that? If the cockchafer drops into one of my guard-houses, I must needs shoot him; if I hear that he is in house, I must needs go and surround him, catch him, and shoot him there. But the devil take me if I puzzle my brains in order to stain my own uniform!"

"Commandant, letters signed by three ministers bid you obey Mademoiselle de Verneuil."

"Then, citizen, let her come herself and order me. I will see what can be done then."

"Very well, citizen," replied Corentin haughtily; "she shall do so without delay. She shall tell you herself the very hour and minute of the *ci-devant's* arrival. Perhaps, indeed, she will not be at ease till she has seen you posting your sentinels and surrounding her house."

"The devil has turned man!" said the old demi-brigadier sorrowfully to himself, as he saw Corentin striding hastily up the Queen's Staircase, on which this scene had passed, and reaching the gate of Saint Léonard. "He will hand over Citizen Montauran to me bound hand and foot," went on Hulot, talking to himself; "and I shall have the nuisance of presiding over a court-martial. After all," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "the Gars is an enemy of the Republic: he killed my poor Gérard, and it will be at worst one noble the less. Let him go the devil!" And he turned briskly on his boot-heel, and went the rounds of the town whistling the Marseillaise.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil was deep in one of those reveries whose secrets remain, as it were, buried in the abysses of the soul, and whose crowd of contradictory thoughts often show their victims that a stormy and passionate life may be held between four walls, without leaving the couch on which existence is then passed. In presence of the catastrophe of the drama which she had come to seek, the girl summoned up before her by turns the scenes of love and anger which had so powerfully agitated her life during the ten days that had passed since her first meeting with the marquis. As she did so the sound of a man's step echoed in the salon beyond her apartment; she started, the door opened, she turned her head sharply, and saw—Corentin.

"Little traitress!" said the head-agent of police, "will the fancy take you to deceive me again? Ah, Marie, Marie! You are playing a very dangerous game in leaving me out of it, and arranging your *coups* without consulting me! If the marquis has escaped his fate—"

"It is not your fault, you mean?" answered Mademoiselle de Verneuil, with profound sarcasm. "Sir!" she went on in a grave voice, "by what right have you once more entered my house?"

"*Your* house?" asked he, with bitter emphasis.

"You remind me," replied she, with an air of nobility, "that I am not at home. Perhaps you intentionally chose this house for the safer commission of your murders here? I will leave it; I would take refuge in a desert rather than any longer receive—"

"Say the word—spies!" retorted Corentin. "But this house is neither yours nor mine: it belongs to Government; and as to leaving it, you would do nothing of the kind," added he, darting a devilish look at her.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil rose in an impulse of wrath, and made a step or two forward; but she stopped suddenly as she saw Corentin lift the window curtain and begin to smile as he requested her to come close to him.

"Do you see that pillar of smoke?" said he with the intense calm which he knew how to preserve on his pallid face, however deeply he was moved.

"What connection can there be between my departure and the weeds that they are burning there?" asked she.

"Why is your voice so changed in tone?" answered Corentin. "Poor little girl!" he added gently, "I know all. The marquis is coming to-day to Fougères, and it is not with the intention of giving him up to us that you have arranged this boudoir, these flowers, these wax-lights, in so luxurious a fashion."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil grew pale as she saw the marquis's death written in the eyes of this tiger with a human countenance; and the passion which she felt for her lover rose near madness. Every hair of her head seemed to pour into it a fierce and intolerable pain, and she fell upon the ottoman. Corentin stood for a minute with his arms folded, half pleased at a torture which avenged him for the sarcasm and scorn which this woman had heaped upon him, half vexed at seeing the sufferings of a creature whose yoke, heavy as it might be, always had something agreeable.

"She loves him!" muttered he.

"Love him?" cried she, "what does that word mean? Corentin! he is my life, my soul, the breath of my being!" She flung herself at the feet of the man, whose calm was terrible to her.

"Soul of mud!" she said, "I would rather abase myself to gain his life than to lose it. I would save him at the price of every drop of my blood! Speak! What will you have?"

Corentin started.

"I came to put myself at your orders, Marie," he said, the tones of his voice full of gentleness, and raising her up with graceful politeness. "Yes, Marie! your insults will not hinder me from being all yours, provided that you deceive me no more. You know, Marie, that no man fools me with impunity."

"Ah! if you would have me love you, Corentin, help me to save him!"

"Well, at what hour does the marquis

come?" said he, constraining himself to make the inquiry in a calm tone.

"Alas! I know not."

They gazed at each other without speaking.

"I am lost!" said Mademoiselle de Verneuil to herself.

"She is deceiving me," thought Corentin. "Marie," he continued aloud, "I have two maxims: the one is, never to believe a word of what women say, which is the way not to be their dupe; the other is, always to inquire whether they have not some interest in doing the contrary of what they say, and behaving in a manner the reverse of the actions which they are good enough to confide to us. I think we understand each other now?"

"Excellently," replied Mademoiselle de Verneuil. "You want proofs of my good faith; but I am keeping them for the minute when you shall have given me some proofs of yours."

"Good-by, then, mademoiselle," said Corentin dryly.

"Come," continued the girl, smiling, "take a chair. Sit there, and do not sulk, or else I shall manage very well to save the marquis without you. As for the three hundred thousand francs, the prospect of which is always before your eyes, I can tell them out for you in gold there on the chimney-piece the moment that the marquis is in safety."

Corentin rose, fell back a step or two, and stared at Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"You have become rich in a very short time," said he, in a tone the bitterness of which was still disguised.

"Montauran," said Marie, with a smile of compassion, "could himself offer you much more than that for his ransom; so prove to me that you have the means of holding him scathless, and—"

"Could not you," said Corentin suddenly, "let him escape the same moment that he comes? For Hulot does not know the hour and—"

He stopped, as if he reproached himself with having said too much.

"But can it be *you* who are applying to *me* for a device?" he went on, smiling in the most natural manner. "Listen, Marie! I am convinced of your sincerity. Promise to make me amends for all that I lose in your service, and I will lull the blockhead of a commandant to sleep so neatly that the marquis will enjoy as much liberty at Fougères as at Saint James."

"I promise you!" replied the girl with a kind of solemnity.

"Not in that way," said he. "Swear it by your mother."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil started; but raising a trembling hand, she gave the oath demanded by this man, whose manner had just changed so suddenly.

"You can do with me as you will," said Corentin. "Do not deceive me, and you will bless me this evening."

"I believe you, Corentin!" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil, quite touched.

She bowed farewell to him with a gentle inclination of her head, and he on his side smiled with amiability, mingled with surprise, as he saw the expression of tender melancholy on her face.

"What a charming creature!" cried Corentin to himself as he departed. "Shall I never possess her, and make her at once the instrument of my fortune and the source of my pleasures? To think of her throwing herself at my feet! Oh, yes! the marquis shall perish; and if I cannot obtain the girl except by plunging her into the mire, I will plunge her. Anyhow," he thought, as he came to the square whither his steps had led him without his knowledge, "perhaps she really distrusts me no longer. A hundred thousand crowns at a moment's notice! She thinks me avaricious. Either it is a trick, or she has married him already."

Corentin, lost in thought, could not make up his mind to any certain course of action. The fog, which the sun had dispersed toward midday, was regaining all its force by degrees, and became so thick that he could no longer make out the trees even at a short distance.

"Here is a new piece of ill-luck," said he to himself, as he went slowly home. "It is impossible to see anything half a dozen paces off. The weather is protecting our

lovers. How is one to watch a house which is guarded by such a fog as this? Who goes there?" cried he, clutching the arm of a stranger who appeared to have escaladed the promenade across the most dangerous crags.

"'Tis I," said a childish voice simply.

"Ah! the little boy Redfoot. Don't you wish to avenge your father?" asked Corentin.

"Yes!" said the child.

"'Tis well. Do you know the Gars?"

"Yes."

"Better still. Well, do not leave me. Do exactly whatsoever I tell you, and you will finish your mother's work and gain big sous. Do you like big sous?"

"Yes."

"You like big sous, and you want to kill the Gars? I will take care of you. Come, Marie," said Corentin to himself after a pause, "you shall give him up to us yourself! She is too excitable to judge calmly of the blow I am going to deal her; and besides, passion never reflects. She does not know the marquis's handwriting, so here is the moment to spread a net for her into which her character will make her rush blindly. But to assure the success of my trick, I have need of Hulot, and I must hasten to see him."

At the same time, Mademoiselle de Verneuil and Francine were debating the means of extricating the marquis from the dubious generosity of Corentin and the bayonets of Hulot.

"I will go and warn him," said the Breton girl.

"Silly child! do you know where he is? Why, I, with all my heart's instinct to aid me, might search long without meeting him."

After having devised no small number of the idle projects which are so easy to carry out by the fireside, Mademoiselle de Verneuil cried, "When I see him, his danger will inspire me!"

Then she amused herself, like all ardent spirits, with the determination not to resolve till the last moment, trusting in her star, or in that instinctive address which seldom deserts women. Never, perhaps, had her heart throbbed so wildly. Sometimes she remained as if thunderstruck, with fixed eyes; and then, at the least noise, she quivered like the half-uprooted trees which the wood-cutter shakes strongly with a rope to hasten their fall. Suddenly a violent explosion, produced by the discharge of a dozen guns, echoed in the distance. Mademoiselle de Verneuil turned pale, caught Francine's hand, and said to her:

"I die: they have killed him!"

The heavy tread of a soldier was heard in the salon, and the terrified Francine rose and ushered in a corporal. The Republican, after making a military salute to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, presented to her some letters written on not very clean paper. The soldier, receiving no answer from the young lady, withdrew, observing, "Madame, 'tis from the commandant."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil, a prey to sinister forebodings, read the letter, which seemed to have been hastily written by Hulot:

"'Mademoiselle, my counter-Chouans have seized one of the Gars' messengers, who has just been shot. Among the letters found on him, that which I inclose may be of some concern to you, etc.'"

"Thank Heaven! 'tis not he whom they have killed," cried she, throwing the letter into the fire.

She breathed more freely, and greedily read the note which had been sent her. It was from the marquis, and appeared to be addressed to Madame du Gua:

"'No, my angel, I shall not go to-night to the Vivetière. To-night you will lose your wager with the count, and I shall triumph over the Republic in the person of this delicious girl, who, you will agree, is surely worth one night. 'Tis the only real advantage that I shall reap from this campaign, for La Vendée is submitting. There is nothing more to do in France; and, of course, we shall return together to England. But to-morrow for serious business!'"

The note dropped from her hands; she closed her eyes, kept the deepest silence, and remained leaning back, her head resting on a cushion. After a long pause,

she raised her eyes to the clock, which marked the hour of four.

"And monsieur keeps me waiting!" she said with savage irony.

"Oh! if he only would not come!" cried Francine.

"If he did not come," said Marie in a stifled voice, "I would go myself to meet him! But no! he cannot be long now. Francine, am I very beautiful?"

"You are very pale."

"Look!" went on Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "look at this perfumed chamber, these flowers, these lights, this intoxicating vapor! Might not all this give a foretaste of heaven to him whom to-night I would plunge in the joys of love?"

"What is the matter, mademoiselle?"

"I am betrayed, deceived, abused, tricked, cheated, ruined! And I will kill him! I will tear him in pieces! Why, yes! there was always in his manner a scorn which he hid but ill, and which I did not choose to see. Oh! it will kill me! Fool that I am," said she, with a laugh. "He comes! I have the night in which to teach him that, whether I be married or no, a man who has once possessed me can never abandon me! I will suit my vengeance to his offense, and he shall die despairing! I thought he had some greatness in his soul; but doubtless 'tis a lackey's son. Assuredly he was clever enough in deceiving me, for I still can hardly believe that the man who was capable of handing me over without compassion to Pille-Miche could descend to a trick worthy of Scapin. 'Tis so easy to dupe a loving woman, that it is the basest of coward's deeds! That he should kill me, well and good! That he should *lie* —he whom I have exalted so high! To the scaffold! To the scaffold! Ah! I would I could see him guillotined! And am I after all so very cruel? He will die covered with kisses and caresses which will have been worth to him twenty years of life!"

"Marie," said Francine, with an angelic sweetness, "be your lover's victim, as so many others are; but do not make yourself either his mistress or his executioner. Keep his image at the bottom of your heart, without making it a torture to yourself. If there were no joy in hopeless love, what would become of us, weak women that we are? That God, Marie, on whom you never think, will reward us for having followed our vocation on earth —our vocation to love and to suffer!"

"Kitten!" answered Mademoiselle de Verneuil, patting Francine's hand. "Your voice is very sweet and very seductive. Reason is attractive indeed in your shape. I would I could obey you."

"You pardon him? You would not give him up?"

"Silence! Speak to me no more of that man. Compared with him, Corentin is a noble being. Do you understand me?"

She rose, hiding under a face of hideous calm both the distraction which seized her and her inextinguishable thirst of vengeance. Her gait, slow and measured, announced a certain irrevocableness of resolve. A prey to thought, devouring the insult, and too proud to confess the least of her torments, she went to the picket at the gate of Saint Léonard to ask where the commandant was staying. She had hardly left her house when Corentin entered it.

"Oh, Monsieur Corentin!" cried Francine, "if you are interested in that young man, save him! Mademoiselle is going to give him up. This wretched paper has ruined all!"

Corentin took the letter carelessly, asking, "And where has she gone?"

"I do not know."

"I will hasten," said he, "to save her from her own despair."

He vanished, taking the letter with him, left the house quickly, and said to the little boy who was playing before the door, "Which way did the lady who has just come out go?"

Galope-Chopine's son made a step or two with Corentin to show him the steep street which led to the Porte Saint Léonard. "That way," said he, without hesitation, obeying the instinct of vengeance with which his mother had inspired his heart.

At the same moment four men in dis-

guise entered Mademoiselle de Verneuil's house without being seen either by the little boy or by Corentin.

"Go back to your post," said the spy. "Pretend to amuse yourself by twisting the shutter latches; but keep a sharp lookout and watch everything, even on the housetops."

Corentin darted quickly in the direction pointed out by the boy, thought he recognized Mademoiselle de Verneuil through the fog, and actually caught her up at the moment when she reached the guard at Saint Léonard's.

"Where are you going?" said he, holding out his arm. "You are pale. What has happened? Is it proper for you to go out alone like this? Take my arm."

"Where is the commandant?" asked she.

Mademoiselle de Verneuil had scarcely finished the words when she heard the movement of a reconnoitering party outside Saint Léonard's Gate, and soon she caught Hulot's deep voice in the midst of the noise.

"God's thunder!" cried he, "I never saw darker weather than this to make rounds in. The *ci-devant* has the clerk of the weather at his orders."

"What are you grumbling at?" answered Mademoiselle de Verneuil, pressing his arm hard. "This fog is good to cover vengeance as well as perfidy. Commandant," added she, in a low voice, "the question is how to concert measures with me so that the Gars cannot escape to-day."

"Is he at your house?" asked Hulot, in a voice the emotion of which showed his wonder.

"No," she answered. "But you must give me a trusty man, and I will send him to warn you of the marquis's arrival."

"What are you thinking of?" said Corentin eagerly, to Marie. "A soldier in your house would alarm him; but a child (and I know where to find one) will inspire no distrust."

"Commandant," went on Mademoiselle de Verneuil, "thanks to the fog you are cursing, you can surround my house this very moment. Set soldiers everywhere. Place a picket in Saint Léonard's Church, to make sure of the esplanade on which the windows of my drawing-room open. Post men on the promenade, for though the window of my room is twenty feet above the ground, despair sometimes lends men strength to cover the most dangerous distances. Listen! I shall probably send this gentleman away by the door of my house; so be sure to give none but a brave man the duty of watching it, for," said she, with a sigh, "no one can deny him courage, and he will defend himself!"

"Gudin!" cried the commandant, and the young Fougèrese started from the midst of the force which had come back with Hulot, and which had remained drawn up at some distance.

"Listen, my boy," said the old soldier to him in a low voice; "this brimstone of a girl is giving up the Gars to us. I do not know why, but that does not matter; it is no business of ours. Take ten men with you, and post yourself so as to watch the close at the end of which the girl's house is; but take care that neither you nor your men are seen."

"Yes, commandant; I know the ground."

"Well, my boy," went on Hulot; "Beau-Pied shall come and tell you from me when you must draw fox. Try to get up with the marquis yourself, and kill him if you can, so that I may not have to shoot him by form of law. You shall be lieutenant in a fortnight, or my name is not Hulot. Here, mademoiselle, is a fellow who will not shirk," said he to the young lady, pointing to Gudin. "He will keep good watch before your house, and if the *ci-devant* comes out or tries to get in, he will not miss him."

Gudin went off with half a score of soldiers.

"Are you quite sure what you are doing?" whispered Corentin to Mademoiselle de Verneuil. She answered him not, but watched with a kind of satisfaction the departure of the men who, under the sub-lieutenant's orders, went to take up their post on the promenade, and of those

who, according to Hulot's instructions, posted themselves along the dark walls of Saint Léonard's.

"There are houses adjoining mine," she said to the commandant. "Surround them too. Let us not prepare regret for ourselves by neglecting one single precaution that we ought to take."

"She has gone mad!" thought Hulot.

"Am I not a prophet?" said Corentin in his ear. "The child I mean to send into the house is the little boy Bloody Foot, and so—"

He did not finish. Mademoiselle de Verneuil had suddenly sprung toward her house, whither he followed her, whistling cheerfully, and when he caught her up she had already gained the door, where Corentin also found Galope-Chopine's son.

"Mademoiselle," said he to her, "take this little boy with you. You can have no more unsuspicious or more active messenger. When" (and he breathed as it were in the child's ear) "you see the Gars come in, whatever they tell you, run away, come and find me at the guard-house, and I will give you enough to keep you in cakes for the rest of your life."

The youthful Breton pressed Corentin's hand hard at these words, and followed Mademoiselle de Verneuil.

"Now, my good friends!" cried Corentin, when the door shut, "come to an explanation when you like! If you make love now, my little marquis, it will be on your shroud!"

But then, unable to make up his mind to lose sight of the fateful abode, he directed his steps to the promenade, where he found the commandant busy in giving some orders. Soon night fell; and two hours passed without the different sentinels, who were stationed at short distances, perceiving anything which gave suspicion that the marquis had crossed the triple line of watchful lurkers who beset the three accessible sides of the Papegaut's Tower. A score of times Corentin had gone from the promenade to the guard-house; as often his expectation had been deceived, and his youthful emissary had not come to meet him.

The spy, lost in thought, paced the promenade, a victim to the tortures of three terrible contending passions—love, ambition, and greed. Eight struck on all the clocks. The moon rose very late, so that the fog and the night wrapped in ghastly darkness the spot where the tragedy devised by this man was about to draw to its catastrophe. The agent of police managed to stifle his passions, crossed his arms tightly on his breast, and never turned his eyes from the window which rose like a phantom of light above the tower. When his steps led him in the direction of the glens which edged the precipice, he mechanically scrutinized the fog, which was furrowed by the pale glow of some lights burning here and there in the houses of the town and suburbs above and below the rampart. The deep silence which prevailed was only disturbed by the murmur of the Nancon, by the mournful peals from the belfry at intervals, by the heavy steps of the sentinels, or by the clash of arms as they came, hour after hour, to relieve guard. Mankind and nature alike—all had become solemn.

It was just at this time that Pille-Miche observed, "It is as black as a wolf's throat!"

"Get on with you!" answered Marche-à-Terre, "and don't speak any more than a dead dog does!"

"I scarcely dare draw my breath," rejoined the Chouan.

"If the man who has just displaced a stone wants my knife sheathed in his heart, he has only got to do it again," whispered Marche-à-Terre in so low a voice that it blended with the ripple of the Nançon waters.

"But it was me," said Pille-Miche.

"Well, you old money-bag," said the leader, "slip along on your belly like a snake, or else we shall leave our carcasses here before the time!"

"I say, Marche-à-Terre!" went on the incorrigible Pille-Miche, helping himself with his hands to hoist himself along on his stomach and reach the level where was his comrade, into whose ear he whis-

pered, so low that the Chouans who followed them could not catch a syllable, "I say, Marche-à-Terre! if we may trust our Grande-Garce, there must be famous booty up there! Shall we two share?"

"Listen, Pille-Miche!" said Marche-à-Terre, halting, still flat on his stomach; and the whole body imitated his movement, so exhausted were the Chouans by the difficulties which the scarped rock offered to their progress. "I know you," went on Marche-à-Terre, "to be one of those honest Jack Take-alls who are quite as ready to give blows as to receive them when there is no other choice. We have not come here to put on dead men's shoes: we are devil against devil, and woe to those who have the shortest nails. The Grande-Garce has sent us here to save the Gars. Come, lift your dog's face up and look at that window above the tower! He is there."

At the same moment midnight struck. The moon rose, and gave to the fog the aspect of a white smoke. Pille-Miche clutched Marche-à-Terre's arm violently, and, without speaking, pointed to the triangular steel of some glancing bayonets ten feet above them.

"The Blues are there already!" said he; "we shall do nothing by force."

"Patience!" answered Marche-à-Terre; "if I examined the whole place rightly this morning, we shall find at the foot of the Papegaut's Tower, between the ramparts and the promenade, a little space where they constantly store manure, and on which a man can drop from above as on a bed."

"If Saint Labre," said Pille-Miche. "would graciously change the blood which is going to flow into good cider, the men of Fougères would find stores of it to-morrow!"

Marche-à-Terre covered his friend's mouth with his broad hand. Then a caution, given under his breath, ran from file to file to the very last Chouan who hung in the air, clinging to the briars of the schist. Indeed, Corentin's ear was too well trained not to have heard the rustle of some bushes which the Chouans had pulled about, and the slight noise of the pebbles rolling to the bottom of the precipice, standing, as he did, on the edge of the esplanade. Marche-à-Terre, who seemed to possess the gift of seeing in the dark, or whose senses, from their continual exercise, must have acquired the delicacy of those of savages, had caught sight of Corentin. Perhaps, like a well-broken dog, he had even scented him. The detective listened in vain through the silence, stared in vain at the natural wall of schist; he could discover nothing there. If the deceptive glimmer of the fog allowed him to perceive some Chouans, he took them for pieces of rock, so well did these human bodies preserve the air of inanimate masses. The danger which the party ran was of brief duration. Corentin was drawn off by a very distinct noise which was audible at the other end of the promenade, where the supporting wall ceased and the rapid slope of the cliff began. A path traced along the border of the schist, and communicating with the Queen's Staircase, ended exactly at this meeting-place. As Corentin arrived there, he saw a figure rise as if by magic, and when he put out his hand to grasp this form—of whose intentions, whether it was real or fantastic, he did not augur well—he met the soft and rounded outlines of a woman.

"The deuce take you, my good woman!" said he in a low tone; "if you had met any one but me, you would have been likely to get a bullet through your head! But whence do you come, and whither are you going at such an hour as this? Are you dumb? It is really a woman, though," said he to himself.

As silence was becoming dangerous, the stranger replied, in a tone which showed great fright, "Oh! good man, I be coming back from the *veillée*."

"'Tis the marquis's pretended mother," thought Corentin. "Let us see what she is going to do."

"Well, then, go that way, old woman," he went on aloud, and pretending not to recognize her; "keep to the left if you don't want to get shot."

He remained where he was; but as soon as he saw Madame du Gua making her

way to the Papegaut's Tower, he followed her afar off with devilish cunning. During this fatal meeting the Chouans had very cleverly taken up their position on the manure heaps to which Marche-à-Terre had guided them.

"Here is the Grande-Garce!" whispered Marche-à-Terre, as he rose on his feet against the tower, just as a bear might have done. "We are here!" said he to the lady.

"Good!" answered Madame du Gua. "If you could find a ladder in that house where the garden ends, six feet below the dunghill, the Gars would be saved. Do you see that round window up there? It opens on a dressing-room adjoining the bedroom, and that is where you have to go. The side of the tower at the bottom of which you are, is the only one not watched. The horses are ready; and if you have made sure of the passage of the Nançon, we shall get him out of danger in a quarter of an hour, for all his madness. But if that strumpet wants to come with him, poniard her!"

When Corentin saw that some of the indistinct shapes which he had at first taken for stones were cautiously moving, he at once went off to the guard at the Porte Saint Léonard, where he found the commandant, asleep, but fully dressed, on a camp-bed.

"Let him alone!" said Beau-Pied rudely to Corentin; "he has only just lain down there."

"The Chouans are here!" cried Corentin into Hulot's ear.

"It is impossible; but so much the better!" cried the commandant, dead asleep as he was. "At any rate, we shall have some fighting."

When Hulot arrived on the promenade, Corentin showed him in the gloom the strange position occupied by the Chouans.

"They must have eluded or stifled the sentinels I placed between the Queen's Staircase and the castle," cried the commandant. "Oh, thunder! what a fog! But patience! I will send fifty men under a lieutenant to the foot of the rock. It is no good attacking them where they are, for the brutes are so tough that they would let themselves drop to the bottom of the precipice like stones, without breaking a limb."

The cracked bell of the belfry was sounding two when the commandant came back to the promenade, after taking the strictest military precautions for getting hold of the Chouans commanded by Marche-à-Terre. By this time, all the guards having been doubled, Mademoiselle de Verneuil's house had become the center of a small army. The commandant found Corentin plunged in contemplation of the window which shone above the Papegaut's Tower.

"Citizen," said Hulot to him, "I think the *ci-devant* is making fools of us, for nothing has stirred."

"He is there!" cried Corentin, pointing to the window. "I saw the shadow of a man on the blind. But I cannot understand what has become of my little boy. They must have killed him, or gained him over. Why, commandant, there is a man for you! Let us advance!"

"God's thunder!" cried Hulot, who had his own reasons for waiting; "I am not going to arrest him in bed! If he has gone in he must come out, and Gudin will not miss him."

"Commandant, I order you in the name of the law to advance instantly upon this house!"

"You are a pretty fellow to think you can set *me* going!"

But Corentin, without disturbing himself at the commandant's wrath, said coolly, "You will please to obey me. Here is an order in regular form, signed by the Minister of War, which will oblige you to do so," he continued, drawing a paper from his pocket. "Do you fancy us fools enough to let that girl do as she pleases? 'Tis a civil war that we are stifling, and the greatness of the result excuses the meanness of the means."

"I take the liberty, citizen, of bidding you go and—you understand me? Enough! Put your left foot foremost, leave me alone—and do it in less than no time!"

"But read," said Corentin.

"Don't bother me with your commis-

sions!" cried Hulot, in a rage at receiving orders from a creature whom he held so despicable. But at the same moment Galopé-Chopine's son appeared in their midst, like a rat coming out of the ground.

"The Gars is on his way!" he cried.

"Which way?"

"By Saint Léonard's Street."

"Beau-Pied," whispered Hulot in the ear of the corporal who was near him, "run and tell the lieutenant to advance on the house, and keep up some nice little file-firing! You understand? File to the left, and march on the tower, you there!" he cried aloud.

In order perfectly to comprehend the catastrophe, it is necessary now to return with Mademoiselle de Verneuil to her house. When passion comes to a crisis, it produces in us an intensity of intoxication far above the trivial stimulus of opium or of wine. The lucidity which ideas then acquire, the delicacy of the overexcited senses, produce the strangest and the most unexpected effects.

When they find themselves under the tyranny of a single thought, certain persons clearly perceive things the most difficult of perception, while the most palpable objects are for them as though they did not exist. Mademoiselle de Verneuil was suffering from this kind of intoxication, which turns real life into something resembling the existence of sleep-walkers, when, after reading the marquis's letter, she eagerly made all arrangements to prevent his escaping her vengeance, just as, but the moment before, she had made every preparation for the first festival of her love. But when she saw her house carefully surrounded, by her own orders, with a triple row of bayonets, her soul was suddenly enlightened. She sat in judgment on her own conduct, and decided, with a kind of horror, that what she had just committed was a crime. In her first moment of distress she sprang toward the door-step, and stood there motionless for an instant, endeavoring to reflect, but unable to bring any reasoning process to a conclusion. She was so absolutely uncertain what she had just done, that she asked herself why she was standing in the vestibule of her own home, holding a strange child by the hand.

Before her eyes thousands of sparks danced in the air like tongues of fire. She began to walk in order to shake off the hideous stupor which had enveloped her, but like a person asleep, she could not realize the true form or color of any object. She clutched the little boy's hand with a violence foreign to her usual nature, and drew him along with so rapid a step that she seemed to possess the agility of a mad woman. She saw nothing at all in the drawing-room, as she crossed it, and yet she received there the salutes of three men, who drew aside to make way for her.

"Here she is!" said one.

"She is very beautiful!" cried the priest.

"Yes," answered the first speaker; "but how pale and agitated she is!"

"And how absent!" said the third. "She does not see us."

At her own chamber door Mademoiselle de Verneuil perceived the sweet and joyful face of Francine, who whispered in her ear, "He is there, Marie!"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil roused herself, was able to collect her thoughts, looked at the child whose hand she held, and answered Francine: "Lock this little boy up somewhere, and if you wish me to live, take good care not to let him escape."

As she slowly uttered these words she had been fixing her eyes on the chamber door, on which they remained glued with so terrible a stillness that a man might have thought she saw her victim through the thickness of the panels. She gently pushed the door open, and shut it without turning her back, for she perceived the marquis standing in front of the fireplace. The young noble's dress, without being too elaborate, had a certain festal air of ornament, which heightened the dazzling effect that lovers produce on women. As she saw this, Mademoiselle de Verneuil recovered all her presence of mind. Her lips — strongly set though

half open—exhibited the enamel of her white teeth, and outlined an incomplete smile, the expression of which was one of terror rather than of delight. She stepped slowly toward the young man, and pointed with her finger toward the clock.

"A man who is worth loving is worth the trouble of waiting for him," said she with feigned gayety.

And then, overcome by the violence of her feelings, she sank upon the sofa which stood near the fire-place.

"Dearest Marie, you are very attractive when you are angry!" said the marquis, seating himself beside her, taking a hand which she abandoned to him, and begging for a glance which she would not give. "I hope," he went on in a tender and caressing tone, "that Marie will in a moment be vexed with herself for having hidden her face from her fortunate husband."

When she heard these words she turned sharply, and stared him straight in the eyes.

"What does this formidable look mean?" continued he, laughing. "But your hand is on fire, my love; what is the matter?"

"Your love?" she answered in a broken and stifled tone.

"Yes!" said he, kneeling before her and seizing both her hands, which he covered with kisses. "Yes, my love! I am yours for life!"

She repulsed him violently and rose; her features were convulsed, she laughed with the laugh of a maniac, and said: "You do not mean a word you say! O, man more deceitful than the lowest of criminals!" She rushed to the dagger which lay by a vase of flowers, and flashed it within an inch or two of the astonished young man's breast.

"Bah!" she said, throwing it down, "I have not respect enough for you to kill you. Your blood is even too vile to be shed by soldiers, and I see no fit end for you but the hangman!"

The words were uttered with difficulty in a low tone, and she stamped as she spoke, like an angry spoiled child. The marquis drew near her, trying to embrace her.

"Do not touch me!" she cried, starting back with a movement of horror.

"She is mad!" said the marquis despairingly to himself.

"Yes!" she repeated, "mad! but not mad enough yet to be your plaything! What would I not pardon to passion? But to wish to possess me without loving me, and to write as much to that—"

"To whom did I write?" asked he, with an astonishment which was clearly not feigned.

"To that virtuous woman who wanted to kill me!"

Then the marquis turned pale, grasped the back of the armchair, on which he leaned so fiercely that he broke it, and cried, "If Madame du Gua has been guilty of any foul trick—"

Mademoiselle de Verneuil looked for the letter, found it not, and called Francine. The Breton girl came.

"Where is the letter?"

"Monsieur Corentin took it."

"Corentin! Ah, I see it all! He forged the letter and deceived me, as he does deceive, with the fiend's own art!"

Then uttering a piercing shriek, she dropped on the sofa to which she staggered, and torrents of tears poured from her eyes. Doubt and certainty were equally horrible. The marquis flung himself at her feet, and pressed her to his heart, repeating a dozen times these words, the only ones he could utter:

"Why weep, my angel? Where is the harm? Even your reproaches are full of love! Do not weep! I love you! I love you forever!"

Suddenly he felt her embrace him with more than human strength, and heard her, amid her sobs, say, "You love me still?"

"You doubt it?" he answered, in a tone almost melancholy.

She disengaged herself sharply from his arms, and fled, as if frightened and confused, a pace or two from him. "Do I doubt it?" she cried.

But she saw the marquis smile with such sweet sarcasm that the words died

on her lips. She allowed him to take her hand and lead her to the threshold. Then Marie saw at the end of the salon an altar, which had been hurriedly arranged during her absence. The priest had at that moment arrayed himself in his sacerdotal vestments; lighted tapers cast on the ceiling a glow as sweet as hope; and she recognized in the two men who had bowed to her the Count de Bauvan and the Baron du Guénic, the two witnesses chosen by Montauran.

"Will you again refuse me?" whispered the marquis to her.

At this spectacle she made one step back so as to regain her chamber, fell on her knees, stretched her hand toward the marquis, and cried: "Oh, forgive me! forgive! forgive!"

Her voice sank, her head fell back, her eyes closed, and she remained as if lifeless in the arms of the marquis and of Francine. When she opened her eyes again she met those of the young chief, full of loving kindness.

"Patience, Marie! This storm is the last," said he.

"The last!" she repeated.

Francine and the marquis looked at each other in astonishment, but she bade them to be silent by a gesture.

"Call the priest," she said, "and leave me alone with him."

They withdrew.

"Father!" she said to the priest, who suddenly appeared before her. "Father! in my childhood an old man, white-haired like yourself, frequently repeated to me that, with a lively faith, man can obtain everything from God. Is this true?"

"It is true," answered the priest. "Everything is possible to Him who has created everything."

Mademoiselle de Verneuil threw herself on her knees with wonderful enthusiasm. "Oh, my God!" said she in her ecstasy, "my faith in Thee is equal to my love for him! Inspire me now: let a miracle be done, or take my life!"

"Your prayer will be heard," said the priest.

Then Mademoiselle de Verneuil presented herself to the gaze of the company, leaning on the arm of the aged, white-haired ecclesiastic. Now, when her deep and secret emotion gave her to her lover's love, she was more radiantly beautiful than she had ever been before, for a serenity resembling that which painters delight in imparting to martyrs stamped on her face a character of majesty. She held out her hand to the marquis, and they advanced together to the altar, at which they knelt down.

This marriage, which was about to be celebrated but a few steps from the nuptial couch, the hastily-erected altar, the cross, the vases, the chalice brought secretly by the priest, the incense smoke eddying round cornices which had as yet seen nothing but the steam of banquets, the priest vested only in cassock and stole, the sacred tapers in a profane salon, composed a strange and touching scene which may give a final touch to our sketch of those times of unhappy memory, when civil discord had overthrown the most holy institutions. Then religious ceremonies had all the attraction of mysteries. Children were baptized in the chambers where their mothers still groaned. As of old, the Lord came in simplicity and poverty to console the dying. Nay, young girls received the Holy Bread for the first time in the very place where they had played the night before. The union of the marquis and Mademoiselle de Verneuil was about to be hallowed, like many others, by an act contravening the new legislation; but later, these marriages, celebrated for the most part at the foot of the oak trees, were all scrupulously legalized.

The priest who thus kept up the old usages to the last moment was one of those men who are faithful to their principles through the fiercest of the storm. His voice, guiltless of the oath which the Republic had exacted, uttered amid the tempest only words of peace. He did not, as Abbé Gudin had done, stir the fire of discord. But he had, with many others, devoted himself to the dangerous mission of performing the rites of the priesthood for the Catholic remnant of souls. In order to succeed in this perilous

ministry, he employed all the pious artifices which persecution necessitates; and the marquis had only succeeded in discovering him in one of the lurking-places which even in our days bear the name of Priests' Holes. The mere sight of his pale and suffering face had such power in inspiring devotion and respect, that it was enough to give to the worldly drawing-room the air of a holy place. All was ready for the act of misfortune and of joy. Before beginning the ceremony, the priest, amid profound silence, asked the name of the bride.

"Marie Nathalie, daughter of Mademoiselle Blanche de Castéran, deceased, sometime abbess of our Lady of Séez, and of Victor Amadeus, duke of Verneuil."

"Born?"

"At La Chasterie, near Alençon."

"I did not think," whispered the baron to the count, "that Montauran would be silly enough to marry her. A duke's natural daughter! Fie! fie!"

"Had she been a king's, it were a different thing," answered the Count de Bauvan with a smile. "But I am not the man to blame him. The other pleases me; and it is with 'Charette's Filly,' as they call her, that I shall make my campaign. *She* is no cooing dove."

The marquis's name had been filled in beforehand; the two lovers signed, and the witnesses after them. The ceremony began, and at the same moment Marie, and she alone, heard the rattle of the guns and the heavy, measured tramp of the soldiers, who, no doubt, were coming to relieve the guard of Blues that she had had posted in the church. She shuddered, and raised her eyes to the cross on the altar.

"She is a saint at last!" murmured Francine.

And the count added, under his breath, "Give me saints like that, and I will be deucedly devout!"

When the priest put the formal question to Mademoiselle de Verneuil, she answered with a "Yes!" followed by a deep sigh. Then she leaned toward her husband's ear, and said to him:

"Before long you will know why I am false to the oath I took never to marry you."

When, after the ceremony, the company had passed into a room where dinner had been served, and at the very moment when the guests were taking their places, Jeremy entered in a state of alarm. The poor bride rose quickly, went, followed by Francine, to meet him, and with one of the excuses which women know so well how to invent, begged the marquis to do the honors of the feast by himself for a short time. Then she drew the servant aside before he could commit an indiscretion, which would have been fatal.

"Ah! Francine. To feel one's self dying and not to be able to say 'I die!'" cried Mademoiselle de Verneuil, who did not return to the dining-room.

Her absence was capable of being interpreted on the score of the just-concluded rite. At the end of the meal, and just as the marquis's anxiety had reached its height, Marie came back in the full gala costume of a bride. Her face was joyous and serene, while Francine, who was with her, showed such profound alarm in all her features that the guests thought they saw in the two countenances some eccentric picture where the wild pencil of Salvator Rosa had represented Death and Life hand in hand.

"Gentlemen," said she to the priest, the baron, and the count, "you must be my guests this night; for you would run too much risk in trying to leave Fougères. My good maid has her orders, and will guide each of you to his apartment. No mutiny!" said she to the priest, who was about to speak. "I hope you will not disobey a lady's orders on the day of her marriage."

They were alone, at last. Marie looked at the clock, and said to herself, "Six hours more to live!"

. . . . . .

She awoke with a start in one of those sudden movements that disturb us when we have arranged with ourselves to wake next day at a certain time. "I have actually slept!" she exclaimed, seeing by the glimmer of the candles that the clock

hand would soon point to the hour of two in the morning.

She went and gazed at the marquis, who was asleep, his head resting on one hand, as children sleep, a half smile on his face. "Ah!" she whispered, "he sleeps like a child! But how could he mistrust me—me, who owe him ineffable happiness?"

She touched him gently; he woke and finished the smile.

Rapidly examining the exquisite picture which his wife's face presented, attributing to some melancholy thought the cloud that shadowed Marie's brows, the marquis asked gently:

"Why this shadow of sadness, love?"

"Poor Alphonse! Whither do you think I have brought you?" asked she, trembling.

"To happiness—"

"To death!"

And with a shudder of horror she sprang to the window. The astonished marquis followed her. His wife drew the curtain, and pointed out to him with her finger a score of soldiers on the square. The moon, which had chased away the fog, cast its white light on the uniforms, the guns, the impassive figure of Corentin, who paced to and fro like a jackal waiting for his prey, and the commandant, who stood motionless, his arms crossed, his face lifted, his lips drawn back, ill at ease, and on the watch.

"Well, Marie! never mind them!"

"Why do you smile, Alphonse? 'Twas *I* who placed them there!"

"You are dreaming!"

"No!"

They looked at each other for a moment: the marquis guessed all, and, clasping her in his arms, said:

"There! I love you still!"

"Then, all is not lost!" cried Marie. "Alphonse," she said, after a pause, "there is still hope!"

At this moment they distinctly heard the low owl's hoot, and Francine came suddenly out of the dressing-room. "Pierre is there!" she cried, with a joy bordering on delirium.

Then she and the marchioness dressed Montauran in a Chouan's garb with the wonderful rapidity which belongs only to women. When the marchioness saw her husband busy loading the weapons which Francine had brought, she slipped out deftly, after making a sign of intelligence to her faithful Breton maid. Then Francine led the marquis to the dressing-room which adjoined the chamber; and the young chief, seeing a number of sheets strongly knotted together, could appreciate the careful activity with which the girl had worked to outwit the vigilance of the soldiers.

"I can never get through there," said the marquis, scanning the narrow embrasure of the *œil-de-bœuf*.

But at the same moment a huge, dark face filled its oval, and a hoarse voice, well known to Francine, cried in a low tone:

"Be quick, general! These toads of Blues are stirring."

"Oh! one kiss more!" said a sweet, quivering voice.

The marquis, whose foot was already on the ladder of deliverance, but a part of whose body was still in the loop-hole, felt himself embraced despairingly. He uttered a cry as he perceived that his wife had put on his own garments. He would have held her, but she tore herself fiercely from his arms, and he found himself obliged to descend. He held a rag of stuff in his hand, and a sudden gleam of moonlight coming to give him light, he saw that the fragment was part of the waistcoat he had worn the night before.

"Halt! Fire by platoons!"

These words, uttered by Hulot in the midst of a silence which was terrifying, broke the spell that seemed to reign over the actors and the scene. A salvo of bullets coming from the depths of the valley to the foot of the tower succeeded the volleys of the Blues stationed on the promenade. The Republican fire was steady, continuous, unpitying; but its victims uttered not a single cry, and between each volley the silence was terrible.

Still Corentin, who had heard one of the aërial forms which he had pointed out to

the commandant falling from the upper part of the ladder, suspected some trick.

"Not one of our birds sings," said he to Hulot. "Our two lovers are quite capable of playing some trick to amuse us here, while they are perhaps escaping by the other side."

And the spy, eager to clear up the puzzle, sent Galope-Chopine's son to fetch torches.

Corentin's suggestion was so well understood by Hulot that the old soldier, attentive to the noise of serious fighting in front of the guard at Saint Léonard's, cried, "'Tis true; there cannot be two of them." And he rushed toward the guard-house.

"We have washed his head with lead, commandant," said Beau-Pied, coming to meet him. "But he has killed Gudin and wounded two men. The madman broke through three lines of our fellows, and would have gained the fields but for the sentinel at the Porte Saint Léonard, who skewered him with his bayonet."

When he heard these words, the commandant hurried into the guard-house, and saw on the camp-bed a bleeding form which had just been placed there. He drew near the seeming marquis, raised the hat which covered his face, and dropped upon a chair.

"I thought so!" he cried fiercely, folding his arms. "Holy thunder! she had kept him too long!"

None of the soldiers stirred. The commandant's action had displaced the long black hair of a woman, which fell down. Then suddenly the silence was broken by the tramp of many armed men. Corentin entered the guard-house in front of four soldiers carrying Montauran, both whose legs and both whose arms had been broken by many gunshots, on a bier formed by their guns. The marquis was laid on the camp-bed by the side of his wife, saw her, and summoned up strength enough to clutch her hand convulsively. The dying girl painfully turned her head, recognized her husband, shuddered with a spasm horrible to see, and murmured these words in an almost stifled voice:

"A Day without a Morrow! God has heard my prayer too well!"

"Commandant," said the marquis, gathering all his strength, but never quitting Marie's hand, "I count on your honor to announce my death to my younger brother, who is at London. Write to him not to bear arms against France, if he would obey my last words, but never to abandon the king's service."

"It shall be done!" said Hulot, pressing the dying man's hand.

"Take them to the hospital there!" cried Corentin.

Hulot seized the spy by his arm so as to leave the mark of the nails in his flesh, and said, "As your task is done here, get out! and take a good look at the face of Commandant Hulot, so as to keep out of his way, unless you want him to sheathe his toasting-iron in your belly." And the old soldier half drew it as he spoke.

"There is another of your honest folk who will never make their fortune!" said Corentin to himself when he was well away from the guard-house.

The marquis had still strength to thank his foe by moving his head, as a mark of the esteem which soldiers have for generous enemies.

In 1827 an old man, accompanied by his wife, was bargaining for cattle on the market-place of Fougères, without anybody saying anything to him, though he had killed more than a hundred men. They did not even remind him of his surname of Marche-à-Terre. The person to whom the writer owes much precious information as to the characters of this story saw him leading off a cow with that air of simplicity and probity, as he went, which makes men say, "That's an honest fellow!"

As for Cibot, called Pille-Miche, his end is already known. It may be that Marche-à-Terre made a vain attempt to save his comrade from the scaffold, and was present on the square of Alencon at the terrible riot which was one of the incidents of the famous trial of Rifoël, Briond, and La Chanterie.

III.

A PASSION IN THE DESERT.

I WAS at the menagerie.

The first time I saw Monsieur Martin enter the cages I uttered an exclamation of surprise I found myself next to an old soldier with the right leg amputated, who had come in with me. His face had attracted my attention. He had one of those intrepid heads, stamped with the seal of warfare, and on which the battles of Napoleon are written. Besides, he had that frank good-humored expression that always impresses me favorably. He was without doubt one of those troopers who are surprised at nothing, who find matter for laughter in the contortions of a dying comrade, who bury or plunder him quite lightheartedly, who stand intrepidly in the way of bullets;—in fact, one of those men who waste no time in deliberation, and would not hesitate to make friends with the devil himself. After looking very attentively at the proprietor of the menagerie getting out of his box, my companion pursed up his lips with an air of mockery and contempt, with that peculiar and expressive twist which superior people assume to show they are not taken in. Then, when I was expatiating on the courage of Monsieur Martin, he smiled, shook his head knowingly, and said, "Easy enough!"

"How 'easy enough'?" I said. "If you would only explain me the mystery I should be obliged."

After a few minutes, during which we made acquaintance, we went to dine at the first *restaurateur's* whose shop caught our eye. At dessert a bottle of champagne completely refreshed and brightened up the memories of this odd old soldier. He told me his story as follows :—

During the expedition in Upper Egypt under General Desaix, a Provencal soldier fell into the hands of the Mangrabins, and was taken by these Arabs into the deserts beyond the falls of the Nile.

In order to place a sufficient distance between themselves and the French army, the Mangrabins made forced marches and only rested during the night. They camped round a well overshadowed by palm trees under which they had previously concealed a store of provisions. Not surmising that the notion of flight would occur to their prisoner, they contented themselves with binding his hands, and after eating a few dates, and given provender to their horses, went to sleep.

When the brave Provençal saw that his enemies were no longer watching him, he made use of his teeth to steal a scimitar, fixed the blade between his knees, and cut the cords which prevented him using his hands; in a moment he was free. He at once seized a rifle and a dagger, then taking the precaution to provide himself with a sack of dried dates, oats, and powder and shot, and to fasten a scimitar to his waist, he leaped on to a horse and spurred on vigorously in the direction where he thought to find the French army. So impatient was he to see a bivouac again that he pressed on the already tired courser at such speed that its flanks were lacerated with his spurs, and at last the poor animal died, leaving the Frenchman alone in the desert.

After walking some time in the sand with all the courage of an escaped convict, the soldier was obliged to stop, as the day had already ended. In spite of the beauty of an oriental sky at night, he felt he had not strength enough to go on. Fortu-

nately he had been able to find a small hill, on the summit of which a few palm trees shot up into the air; it was their verdure seen from afar which had brought hope and consolation to his heart. His fatigue was so great that he lay down upon a rock of granite, capriciously cut out like a camp-bed; there he fell asleep without taking any precaution to defend himself while he slept. He had made the sacrifice of his life. His last thought was one of regret. He repented having left the Mangrabins, whose nomad life seemed to smile on him now that he was far from them and without help. He was awakened by the sun, whose pitiless rays fell with all their force on the granite and produced an intolerable heat—for he had had the stupidity to place himself inversely to the shadow thrown by the verdant majestic heads of the palm trees. He looked at the solitary trees and shuddered—they reminded him of the graceful shafts crowned with foliage which characterize the Saracen columns in the cathedral of Arles.

But when, after counting the palm trees, he cast his eyes around him, the most horrible despair was infused into his soul. Before him stretched an ocean without limit. The dark sand of the desert spread further than sight could reach in every direction, and glittered like steel struck with bright light. It might have been a sea of looking-glass, or lakes melted together in a mirror. A fiery vapor carried up in streaks made a perpetual whirlwind over the quivering land. The sky was lit with an oriental splendor of insupportable purity, leaving naught for the imagination to desire. Heaven and earth were on fire.

The silence was awful in its wild and terrible majesty. Infinity, immensity, closed in upon the soul from every side. Not a cloud in the sky, not a breath in the air, not a flaw on the bosom of the sand, ever moving in diminutive waves; the horizon ended as at sea on a clear day, with one line of light, definite as the cut of a sword.

The Provençal threw his arms round the trunk of one of the palm trees, as though it were the body of a friend, and then in the shelter of the thin straight shadow that the palm cast upon the granite, he wept. Then sitting down he remained as he was, contemplating with profound sadness the implacable scene, which was all he had to look upon. He cried aloud, to measure the solitude. His voice, lost in the hollows of the hill, sounded faintly and aroused no echo—the echo was in his own heart. The Provencal was twenty-two years old:—he loaded his carbine.

"There'll be time enough," he said to himself, laying on the ground the weapon which alone could bring him deliverance.

Looking by turns at the black expanse and the blue expanse, the soldier dreamed of France—he smelled with delight the gutters of Paris—he remembered the towns through which he had passed, the faces of his fellow-soldiers, the most minute details of his life. His southern fancy soon showed him the stones of his beloved Provence, in the play of the heat which waved over the spread sheet of the desert. Fearing the danger of this cruel mirage, he went down the opposite side of the hill to that by which he had come up the day before. The remains of a rug showed that this place of refuge had at one time been inhabited; at a short distance he saw some palm trees full of dates. Then the instinct which binds us to life awoke again in his heart. He hoped to live long enough to await the passing of some Arabs, or perhaps he might hear the sound of cannon; for at this time Bonaparte was traversing Egypt.

This thought gave him new life. The palm tree seemed to bend with the weight of the ripe fruit. He shook some of it down. When he tasted this unhoped-for manna, he felt sure that the palms had been cultivated by a former inhabitant—the savory, fresh meat of the dates were proof of the care of his predecessor. He passed suddenly from dark despair to an almost insane joy. He went up again to the top of the hill, and spent the rest of the day in cutting down one of the sterile palm trees, which the night before had served him for shelter. A vague mem-

ory made him think of the animals of the desert; and in case they might come to drink at the spring, visible from the base of the rocks but lost further down, he resolved to guard himself from their visits by placing a barrier at the entrance of his hermitage.

In spite of his diligence, and the strength which the fear of being devoured asleep gave him, he was unable to cut the palm in pieces, though he succeeded in cutting it down. At eventide the king of the desert fell; the sound of its fall resounded far and wide, like a sigh in the solitude; the soldier shuddered as though he had heard some voice predicting woe.

But like an heir who does not long bewail a deceased parent, he tore off from this beautiful tree the tall broad green leaves which are its poetic adornment, and used them to mend the mat on which he was to sleep.

Fatigued by the heat and his work, he fell asleep under the red curtains of his wet cave.

In the middle of the night his sleep was troubled by an extraordinary noise; he sat up, and the deep silence around allowed him to distinguish the alternative accents of a respiration whose savage energy could not belong to a human creature.

A profound terror, increased still further by the darkness, the silence, and his waking images, froze his heart within him. He almost felt his hair stand on end, when by straining his eyes to their utmost he perceived through the shadow two faint yellow lights. At first he attributed these lights to the reflection of his own pupils, but soon the vivid brilliance of the night aided him gradually to distinguish the objects around him in the cave, and he beheld a huge animal lying but two steps from him. Was it a lion, a tiger, or a crocodile?

The Provencal was not educated enough to know under what species his enemy ought to be classed; but his fright was all the greater, as his ignorance led him to imagine all terrors at once; he endured a cruel torture, noting every variation of the breathing close to him without daring to make the slightest movement. An odor, pungent like that of a fox, but more penetrating, profounder — so to speak—filled the cave, and when the Provencal became sensible of this, his terror reached its height, for he could no longer doubt the proximity of a terrible companion, whose royal dwelling served him for a shelter.

Presently the reflection of the moon descending on the horizon, lit up the den, rendering gradually visible and resplendent the spotted skin of a panther.

This lion of Egypt slept, curled up like a big dog, the peaceful possessor of a sumptuous niche at the gate of a *hôtel;* its eyes opened for a moment and closed again; its face was turned toward the man. A thousand confused thoughts passed through the Frenchman's mind; first he thought of killing it with a bullet from his gun, but he saw there was not enough distance between them for him to take proper aim—the shot would miss the mark. And if it were to wake! — the thought made his limbs rigid. He listened to his own heart beating in the midst of the silence, and cursed the too violent pulsations which the flow of blood brought on, fearing to disturb that sleep which allowed him time to think of some means of escape.

Twice he placed his hand on his scimitar, intending to cut off the head of his enemy; but the difficulty of cutting the stiff short hair compelled him to abandon this daring project. To miss would be to die for *certain,* he thought; he preferred the chances of fair fight, and made up his mind to wait till morning; the morning did not leave him long to wait.

He could now examine the panther at ease; its muzzle was smeared with blood.

"She's had a good dinner," he thought, without troubling himself as to whether her feast might have been on human flesh. "She won't be hungry when she gets up."

It was a female. The fur on her belly and flanks was glistening white; many small marks like velvet formed beautiful bracelets round her feet; her sinuous tail was also white, ending with black rings;

the overpart of her dress, yellow like unburnished gold, very lissom and soft, had the characteristic blotches in the form of rosettes, which distinguish the panther from every other feline species.

This tranquil and formidable hostess snored in an attitude as graceful as that of a cat lying on a cushion, Her blood-stained paws, nervous and well armed, were stretched out before her face, which rested upon them, and from which radiated her straight slender whiskers, like threads of silver.

If she had been like that in a cage, the Provencal would doubtless have admired the grace of the animal, and the vigorous contrasts of vivid color which gave her robe an imperial splendor; but just then his sight was troubled by her sinister appearance.

The presence of the panther, even asleep, could not fail to produce the effect which the magnetic eyes of the serpent are said to have on the nightingale.

For a moment the courage of the soldier began to fail before this danger, though no doubt it would have risen at the mouth of a cannon charged with shell. Nevertheless, a bold thought brought daylight to his soul and sealed up the source of the cold sweat which sprang forth on his brow. Like men driven to bay, who defy death and offer their body to the smiter, so he, seeing in this merely a tragic episode, resolved to play his part with honor to the last.

"The day before yesterday the Arabs would have killed me perhaps." he said; so considering himself as good as dead already, he waited bravely, with excited curiosity, his enemy's awakening.

When the sun appeared, the panther suddenly opened her eyes; then she put out her paws with energy, as if to stretch them and get rid of cramp. At last she yawned, showing the formidable apparatus of her teeth and pointed tongue, rough as a file.

She licked off the blood which stained her paws and muzzle, and scratched her head with reiterated gestures full of prettiness.

"All right, make a little toilet," the Frenchman said to himself, beginning to recover his gayety with his courage; "we'll say good-morning to each other presently," and he seized the small short dagger which he had taken from the Mangrabins. At this moment the panther turned her head toward the man and looked at him fixedly without moving.

The rigidity of her metallic eyes and their insupportable luster made him shudder, especially when the animal walked toward him. But he looked at her caressingly, staring into her eyes in order to magnetize her, and let her come quite close to him; then with a movement both gentle and affectionate, as though he were caressing the most beautiful of women, he passed his hand over her whole body, from the head to the tail, scratching the flexible vertebræ which divided the panther's yellow back. The animal waved her tail, and her eyes grew gentle; and when for the third time the Frenchman accomplished this interested flattery, she gave forth one of those purrings by which our cats express their pleasure; but this murmur issued from a throat so powerful and so deep, that it resounded through the cave like the last vibrations of an organ in a church. The man, understanding the importance of his caresses, redoubled them. When he felt sure of having extinguished the ferocity of his capricious companion, whose hunger had so fortunately been satisfied the day before, he got up to go out of the cave; the panther let him go out, but when he had reached the summit of the hill she sprang with the lightness of a sparrow hopping from twig to twig, and rubbed herself against his legs, putting up her back after the manner of all the race of cats. Then regarding her guest with eyes whose glare had softened a little, she gave vent to that wild cry which naturalists compare to the grating of a saw.

"She is exacting," said the Frenchman, smiling.

He was bold enough to play with her ears; he scratched her head as hard as he could. When he saw he was successful he tickled her skull with the point of his dagger, watching for the moment to

kill her, but the hardness of her bones made him tremble for his success.

The sultana of the desert showed herself gracious to her slave; she lifted her head, stretched out her neck, and manifested her delight by the tranquillity of her attitude. It suddenly occurred to the soldier that to kill this savage princess with one blow he must poniard her in the throat.

He raised the blade, when the panther, satisfied, no doubt, laid herself gracefully at his feet, and cast up at him glances in which, in spite of their natural fierceness, was mingled confusedly a kind of goodwill. The poor Provencal ate his dates, leaning against one of the palm trees, and casting his eyes alternately on the desert in quest of some liberator and on his terrible companion to watch her uncertain clemency.

The panther looked at the place where the date stones fell, and every time that he threw one down, her eyes expressed an incredible mistrust.

She examined the man with an almost commercial prudence. However, this examination was favorable to him, for when he had finished his meager meal she licked his boots with her powerful rough tongue, brushing off with marvelous skill the dust gathered in the creases.

"Ah, but when she's really hungry!" thought the Frenchman.

In spite of the shudder this thought caused him, the soldier began to measure curiously the proportions of the panther, certainly one of the most splendid specimens of its race. She was three feet high and four feet long without counting her tail; this powerful weapon, rounded like a cudgel, was nearly three feet long. The head, large as that of a lioness, was distinguished by a rare expression of refinement. The cold cruelty of a tiger was dominant, it was true, but there was also a vague resemblance to the face of a sensual woman.

Indeed, the face of this solitary queen had something of the gayety of a drunken Nero: she had satiated herself with blood, and she wanted to play.

The soldier tried if he might walk up and down, and the panther left him free, contenting herself with following him with her eyes, less like a faithful dog than a big Angora cat, observing everything, and every movement of her master.

When he looked round, he saw, by the spring, the remains of his horse; the panther had dragged the carcass all that way; about two-thirds of it had been devoured already. The sight reassured him.

It was easy to explain the panther's absence, and the respect she had had for him while he slept. The first piece of good luck emboldened him to tempt the future, and he conceived the wild hope of continuing on good terms with the panther during the entire day, neglecting no means of taming her and remaining in her good graces.

He returned to her, and had the unspeakable joy of seeing her wag her tail with an almost imperceptible movement at his approach. He sat down then, without fear, by her side, and they began to play together; he took her paws and muzzle, pulled her ears, rolled her over on her back, stroked her warm, delicate flanks. She let him do whatever he liked, and when he began to stroke the hair on her feet she drew her claws in carefully.

The man, keeping the dagger in one hand, thought to plunge it into the belly of the too confiding panther, but he was afraid that he would be immediately strangled in her last convulsive struggle; besides, he felt in his heart a sort of remorse which bid him respect a creature that had done him no harm. He seemed to have found a friend, in a boundless desert; half unconsciously he thought of his first sweetheart, whom he had nicknamed "Mignonne" by way of contrast, because she was so atrociously jealous, that all the time of their love he was in fear of the knife with which she had always threatened him.

This memory of his early days suggested to him the idea of making the young panther answer to this name, now that he began to admire with less terror her swiftness, suppleness, and softness. Toward the end of the day he had famil-

iarized himself with his perilous position; he now almost liked the painfulness of it. At last his companion had got into the habit of looking up at him whenever he cried in a falsetto voice, "Mignonne."

At the setting of the sun Mignonne gave, several times running, a profound melancholy cry.

"She's been well brought up," said the light-hearted soldier; "she says her prayers." But this mental joke only occurred to him when he noticed what a pacific attitude his companion remained in. "Come, *ma petite blonde,* I'll let you go to bed first," he said to her, counting on the activity of his own legs to run away as quickly as possible, directly she was asleep, and seek another shelter for the night.

The soldier awaited with impatience the hour of his flight, and when it had arrived he walked vigorously in the direction of the Nile; but hardly had he made a quarter of a league in the sand when he heard the panther bounding after him, crying with that saw-like cry, more dreadful even than the sound of her leaping.

"Ah!" he said, "then she's taken a fancy to me; she has never met any one before, and it is really quite flattering to have her first love."

That instant the man fell into one of those movable quicksands so terrible to travelers and from which it is impossible to save one's self. Feeling himself caught, he gave a shriek of alarm; the panther seized him with her teeth by the collar, and, springing vigorously backward, drew him, as if by magic, out of the whirling sand.

"Ah, Mignonne!" cried the soldier, caressing her enthusiastically; "we're bound together for life and death—but no jokes, mind!" and he retraced his steps.

From that time the desert seemed inhabited. It contained a being to whom the man could talk, and whose ferocity was rendered gentle by him, though he could not explain to himself the reason for their strange friendship. Great as was the soldier's desire to stay up on guard, he slept.

On awakening he could not find Mignonne; he mounted the hill, and in the distance saw her springing toward him after the habit of these animals, who cannot run on account of the extreme flexibility of the vertebral column. Mignonne arrived, her jaws covered with blood; she received the wonted caress of her companion, showing with much purring how happy it made her. Her eyes, full of languor, turned still more gently than the day before toward the Provencal, who talked to her as one would to a tame animal.

"Ah! mademoiselle, you are a nice girl, aren't you? Just look at that! so we like to be made much of, don't we? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? So you have been eating some Arab or other, have you? that doesn't matter. They're animals just the same as you are; but don't you take to eating Frenchmen, or I shan't like you any longer."

She played like a dog with its master, letting herself be rolled over, knocked about, and stroked, alternately; sometimes she herself would provoke the soldier, putting up her paw with a soliciting gesture.

Some days passed in this manner. This companionship permitted the Provencal to appreciate the sublime beauty of the desert; now that he had a living thing to think about, alternations of fear and quiet, and plenty to eat, his mind became filled with contrasts, and his life began to be diversified.

Solitude revealed to him all her secrets, and enveloped him in her delights. He discovered in the rising and setting of the sun sights unknown to the world. He knew what it was to tremble when he heard over his head the hiss of a bird's wings, so rarely did they pass, or when he saw the clouds, changing and many-colored travelers, melt into one another. He studied in the night time the effects of the moon upon the ocean of sand, where the simoom made waves swift of movement and rapid in their change. He lived the life of the Eastern day, marveling at its wonderful pomp; then, after having reveled in the sight of a hurricane over

the plain where the whirling sands made red, dry mists and death-bearing clouds, he would welcome the night with joy, for then fell the healthful freshness of the stars, and he listened to imaginary music in the skies. Then solitude taught him to unroll the treasures of dreams. He passed whole hours in remembering mere nothings, and comparing his present life with his past.

At last he grew passionately fond of the tigress; for some sort of affection was a necessity.

Whether it was that his will powerfully projected had modified the character of his companion, or whether, because she found abundant food in her predatory excursions in the deserts, she respected the man's life, he began to fear for it no longer, seeing her so well tamed.

He devoted the greater part of his time to sleep, but he was obliged to watch like a spider in its web that the moment of his deliverance might not escape him, if any one should pass the line marked by the horizon. He had sacrificed his shirt to make a flag with, which he hung at the top of a palm tree, whose foliage he had torn off. Taught by necessity, he found the means of keeping it spread out, by fastening it with little sticks; for the wind might not be blowing at the moment when the passing traveler was looking through the desert.

It was during the long hours, when he had abandoned hope, that he amused himself with the panther. He had come to learn the different inflections of her voice, the expressions of her eyes; he had studied the capricious patterns of all the rosettes which marked the gold of her robe. Mignonne was not even angry when he took hold of the tuft at the end of her tail to count the rings, those graceful ornaments which glittered in the sun like jewelry. It gave him pleasure to contemplate the supple, fine outlines of her form, the graceful pose of her head. But it was especially when she was playing that he felt most pleasure in looking at her; the agility and youthful lightness of her movements were a continual surprise to him; he wondered at the supple way which she jumped and climbed, washed herself and arranged her fur, crouched down and prepared to spring. However rapid her spring might be, however slippery the stone she was on, she would always stop short at the word "Mignonne."

One day, in a bright mid-day sun, an enormous bird coursed through the air. The man left his panther to look at this new guest; but after waiting a moment the deserted sultana growled deeply.

"My goodness! I do believe she's jealous," he cried, seeing her eyes become hard again; "the soul of Virginie has passed into her body, that's certain."

The eagle disappeared into the air, while the soldier admired the curved contour of the panther.

But there was such youth and grace in her form! she was beautiful as a woman! the blond fur of her robe mingled well with the delicate tints of faint white which marked her flanks.

The profuse light cast down by the sun made this living gold, these russet markings, to burn in a way to give them an indefinable attraction.

The man and the panther looked at one another with a look full of meaning; the coquette quivered when she felt her friend stroke her head; her eyes flashed like lightning—then she shut them tightly.

"She has a soul," he said, looking at the stillness of this queen of the sands, golden like them, white like them, solitary and burning like them.

Ah! how did it all end?

Alas; as all great passions do end—in a misunderstanding. From some reason *one* suspects the other of treason; they don't come to an explanation through pride, and quarrel and part from sheer obstinacy. Yet sometimes at the best moments a single word or a look are enough.

"Well," the old fellow continued, "with her sharp teeth she one day caught hold of my leg—gently, I daresay; but I, thinking she would devour

me, plunged my dagger into her throat. She rolled over, giving a cry that froze my heart; and I saw her dying, still looking at me without anger. I would have given all the world—my cross even, which I had not got then—to have brought her to life again. It was as though I had murdered a real person; and the soldiers who had seen my flag, and were come to my assistance, found me in tears.

"Well, sir," he said, after a moment of silence, "since then I have been in war in Germany, in Spain, in Russia, in France; I've certainly carried my carcass about a good deal, but never have I seen anything like the desert. Ah! yes, it is very beautiful!"

"What did you feel there?" I asked him.

"Oh! that can't be described, young man! Besides, I am not always regretting my palm trees and my panther. I should have to be very melancholy for that. In the desert, you see, there is everything, and nothing."

"Yes, but explain—"

"Well," he said, with an impatient gesture, "it is God without mankind."

IV.

A TRAGEDY OF THE PEASANTRY.

I.

THE CHATEAU.

"To Monsieur Nathan:

"LES AIGUES, *Aug.* 6, 1823.

"MY DEAR NATHAN—You, whose fancies give the public such delicious dreams, come with me and dream truth. Then you may tell me whether this century can bequeath such dreams to the Nathans and Blondets of the year 1923. You shall measure our distance from the time when the Florines of the 18th century found, upon awakening, a chateau like that of les Aigues in their contract.

"My dear boy, if you receive my letter in the morning, I want you, from your bed, to look at two little pavilions built of red brick, and united, or rather separated, by a green gate. They lie about fifty miles from Paris, on the borders of Burgundy, on the king's highway. That is the place where the diligence deposited your friend.

"On either side of these pavilions winds a hedge of living green, from whence brambles stray, like straggling locks of hair. Here and there shoots of young trees rise arrogantly. Beside the ditch, beautiful flowers bathe their feet in still green water. On the right and left, this hedge joins two lines of trees, and the meadow on each side which it serves to inclose has been cleared and redeemed from waste land.

"A magnificent avenue has its beginning at these old, crumbling pavilions; it is bordered with elms a hundred years old, whose umbrella-like heads incline toward each other and form a long, majestic canopy. Grass grows in the avenue; the wheel-tracks are scarcely discernible. The age of the elms, the width of the footpaths beside the avenue, the venerable appearance of the pavilions, with their brownish stone corners, all indicate that this is the approach to a chateau that is almost royal.

"Before I reached this gate, when I was at the top of a hill which we French are vain enough to call a mountain, and at whose foot lies the village of Conches, which is the stopping-place of the post-chaise, I saw the long valley of les Aigues, at the end of which the high-road turns, and goes straight to the little sub-prefecture of Ville-aux-Fayes, which is ruled over by the nephew of our friend Lupeaulx. Immense forests along the horizon on a high hill bordered by a river overlook

this rich valley, which is framed in the distance by the mountains of a little Switzerland called the Morvan. These extensive forests belong to les Aigues, to the Marquis de Ronquerolles and to the Count de Soulanges, whose chateaux and parks and far-off villages resemble the fantastic landscapes of Breughel de Velours.

"If these details do not put you in mind of all the *chateaux en Espagne* which you have longed to possess in France, you are not worthy of this story which is given you by a bewildered Parisian. I have at last found a place where art mingles with nature, and where neither is spoiled by the other; where art seems like nature, and where nature is artistic. I have come to the oasis of which we have so often dreamed after reading some romance: a nature luxuriant and decorated, containing accidents of picturesqueness without confusion, something wild and mysterious, secret, and out of the commonplace. Let us pass the gate and walk on.

"When my curious eye strives to pierce the length of the avenue, where the sun penetrates only at its rising and setting, at which time it stripes the ground with zebra-like rays, my glance is checked by a small elevation; but after making a detour around this little hill, the long avenue is cut off by a small grove, and we find ourselves in an open square, in the midst of which stands a stone obelisk, like an eternal exclamation point of admiration. Between the stones of this monument, which ends in a spiked ball (only fancy!), hang purple or yellow flowers, according to the season. Les Aigues must certainly have been built by a woman, or for a woman; no man would have had such coquettish ideas; the architect must have had special instructions.

"After crossing the wood, which seems placed there for a sentinel, I reach a delicious bit of ground, at the bottom of whose slope rushes a brook, which I cross upon a little stone arch, covered with superb mosses — the prettiest of Time's mosaics. The avenue follows the course of the brook, by a gentle ascent. In the distance I can see the first picture: a mill, with its dam, its causeway and its trees, its ducks, its linen spread out to dry, its thatched house, its nets and its fish-pond, to say nothing of its miller, who is examining me curiously. Wherever you go in the country, no matter how certain you may be that you are alone, you are sure to be the target for two eyes shaded by a cotton cap; the laborer drops his hoe, the vine-dresser lifts his bowed back, the little guardian of goats or cows or sheep climbs into a willow to spy upon you.

"Soon the avenue changes to an alley bordered by acacias, which leads to a gate that is evidently contemporary with the period when the iron-workers fashioned those airy filagrees that resemble nothing so much as the scrolls a writing-master sets for a copy. On each side of the grating there extends a small ditch whose crest is garnished with menacing spears and barbs, like iron porcupines. This gate is also flanked by two lodges, which are similar to those at the palace of Versailles, and is surmounted by colossal vases. The gold of the arabesques is turning red, for rust has painted it; but this gate, called the avenue gate, which reveals the hand of the great dauphin, to whom les Aigues owes it, is to me very beautiful.

"At the end of the hedge come walls of smooth stone, massed together with mortar made of a red earth; the stones have manifold tints; the bright yellow of the silex, the white of the chalk, and the reddish brown of the sandstone, in many a capricious form. The park at first seems gloomy; its walls are hidden by climbing vines and by trees which have not heard for fifty years the sound of the ax. The place seems to have gone back to its virgin state, by a phenomenon peculiar to forests. The trunks of the trees are covered with clinging creepers which festoon themselves from one tree to another. Shining green mistletoe hangs from the forks of the branches, wherever it can find sufficient moisture. I come across gigantic ivies, those wild arabesques which only flourish at fifty leagues from Paris, where

the land is not too expensive to allow them room to grow. Landscape, in the true sense of the word, requires plenty of room. Here nothing is put in order; the rake is never used; the wheel-ruts are full of water; frogs live their tranquil life; the beautiful forest flowers bud and bloom, and the heather is as fine as that which was brought to you by Florine in January.

"This mystery excites me, and inspires me with vague desires. The forest odors, which delight poetic epicures, who care for the most innocent mosses, the most venomous plants, the moist earth, the willows, the balsams, the wild thyme, the green water of a pool, the rounded star of the yellow water-lily: all these vigorous growths send their fragrance to my nostrils, and in all of them I find one thought, which is perhaps their soul. I dream of a rose-colored dress fluttering along the winding path.

"The alley ends abruptly with a final thicket, composed of birches, poplars, and all the rest of that intelligent family of trees with graceful limbs and elegant form, whose leaves tremble constantly. From there, my dear boy, I see a pond covered with water-lilies, and their broad, flat leaves; on the pond a white and black boat, coquettish as the shallop of a bargeman of the Seine, and light as a nut-shell. Beyond the water rises a chateau, bearing the date 1560; it is built of red brick, with stone trimmings at the corners and windows, which still preserve their lozenge-shaped panes. The stone is cut in diamond points, but hollowed, as in the ducal palace at Venice, on the façade of the Bridge of Sighs.

"This chateau is irregularly built, except in the center, from which descends a double flight of steps, stately and winding, with rounded balustrades which are slender at the top and thicker as they descend. This main part of the chateau is flanked by clock-towers, where the flower-beds are stiffly outlined, and modern pavilions have railings and vases which are more or less Greek. No symmetry here, you see. These buildings, brought together as if by chance, are guarded by several evergreen trees, whose foliage showers upon the roofs in thousands of tiny brown arrows, which nourish the mosses, and vivify the picturesque cracks where the eye rests gladly. There is the pine of Italy, with its red bark and its majestic umbrella of foliage; there is a cedar two hundred years old; a few weeping willows, a Northern fir tree, and a beech which towers above it. In front of the principal tower there are several singular trees; a clipped yew, which recalls some ancient French garden, long since destroyed; there are magnolias with hydrangeas at their feet; the place is like a hospital for out-of-date heroes of horticulture, who have in turn been the fashion, and in turn have, like all heroes, been forgotten.

"A chimney of original shape, which is smoking plentifully at one of the angles, assures me that this delightful picture is not a set scene in an opera. Since there is a kitchen, there are living beings. Can you see me, Blondet, I who think myself in the polar regions when I am at Saint-Cloud, can you see me in the midst of this glowing Burgundy landscape? The sun is pouring down its most vivifying warmth; there is a kingfisher at the border of the pond; the grasshoppers and crickets are chirping; the grain-pods are cracking open; the poppies are dropping their morphine in luscious tears, and everything is sharply outlined beneath the deep blue of the sky. Above the reddish earth of the terraces escape the joyous flames of that natural punch which intoxicates insects and flowers, and which burns our eyes and browns our faces. The grape is ripening, and its tendrils hang in a network of white threads that put laces to shame. Along the house blue larkspurs, nasturtiums and sweet-peas are glowing. A few tube-roses stand at a distance, and orange trees perfume the air. After the poetic exhalations of the woods come the intoxicating pastilles of this botanical seraglio.

"At the top of the steps, like the queen of the flowers, I see a woman dressed in white beneath an umbrella lined with white silk. But she is herself whiter than

the silk, whiter than the lilies at her feet, whiter than the jasmine stars which thrust themselves boldly through the balustrades; she is a Frenchwoman, born in Russia, and she says: 'I had ceased to expect you.' She had seen me from the turn in the road. With what perfection do all women, even the most innocent, understand how to pose for effect! The sound of preparations within tell me that they have waited breakfast until the arrival of the diligence.

"Is not this our dream, the dream of all lovers of the beautiful, no matter under what form it comes, whether in the seraphic beauty which Luini has put into 'The Marriage of the Virgin,' his beautiful fresco at Sarono, or the beauty which Rubens has found in his 'Battle of the Thermodon,' or the beauty which it took five centuries to elaborate in the cathedrals of Seville and Milan, the beauty of the Saracens at Grenada, the beauty of Louis XIV. at Versailles, the beauty of the Alps or the beauty of the Limagne?

"This estate has nothing either too princely or too financial about it, although prince and farmer-general have both lived here, which serves to explain its peculiarities. It has, depending upon it, four thousand acres of woodland, a park of nine hundred acres, the mill, three farms, and another immense farm at Conches, besides its vineyards; the whole thing must bring in an income of seventy-two thousand francs. That is les Aigues, my friend, where I have been expected for the last two years, and where I am at this moment, in the 'chintz room,' which is kept for intimate friends.

"At the upper end of the park, toward Conches, a dozen clear, limpid streams from out the Morvan flow down to empty themselves into the pond, after having ornamented with their liquid ribbons the valleys of the park and its magnificent gardens. The name of les Aigues comes from these charming water-courses. In the old title-deeds the place was called Aigues-Vives, in contradistinction to Aigues-Mortes, but of late years the word Vives has been dropped. The pond empties into the stream which runs parallel with the avenue, through a large, straight channel, bordered its whole length with weeping willows. This channel, thus ornamented, produces a delightful effect. Floating down, seated in the little boat, it is easy to imagine one's self beneath the nave of an immense cathedral, whose choir is represented by the main building of the chateau which is seen in the perspective. When the setting sun throws upon the building its orange tints, mingled with shadows, and lighting up the window-panes, it is easy to imagine that the windows are of stained glass.

"At the end of the stream can be seen Blangy, the principal town of the commune, which contains about sixty houses, together with a village church, a tumble-down building, ornamented with a wooden belfry which seems to hold together a roof of broken tiles. The house of a well-to-do citizen, and the parsonage, can be distinguished from all the others. The commune is a large one, and contains at least two hundred scattered houses besides, to which this collection forms the nucleus. The commune is here and there cut up into little gardens; the roads are remarkable for their fruit trees. The gardens are typical peasant gardens, and contain everything: flowers, onions, cabbages and vines, currants, and plenty of manure. The village has an innocent air; it is rustic; it has a certain ornamental simplicity of which artists are always in search. In the distance is the little town of Soulanges, overhanging the borders of a vast lake, like a building on the lake of Thoune.

"When walking in this park, which has four gates, each one superb in style, the Arcadia of mythology seems flat and stale. Arcadia is in Burgundy and not in Greece; Arcadia is at les Aigues and nowhere else. A river, made up of several brooks, crosses the lower part of the park, in a serpentine course, and gives an air of freshness and quiet and solitude which reminds one of the old monasteries; all the more so, since upon an artificial

island there is really a ruined monastery, whose elegant interior is worthy of the voluptuous financier who founded it. Les Aigues, my friend, belonged to that Bouret who once spent two millions in entertaining Louis XV. How many stormy passions, distinguished intellects and fortunate circumstances have been necessary in order to create this beautiful place! One of Henri IV.'s mistresses rebuilt the chateau on the spot where it now stands, and joined the forest to it. The favorite of the grand dauphin, to whom the place was given, increased the property by several farms. Bouret furnished it with all the exquisite trifles he could find, for one of the celebrities of the opera. The place owes to Bouret the restoration of the ground floor in the style of Louis XV.

"I am lost in astonishment and admiration when I see the dining-room. The eye is at first attracted by a ceiling painted in fresco in the Italian style, and displaying the most wonderful arabesques. Female forms in stucco, ending in leaves and branches, sustain at equal distances baskets of fruit, upon which the foliage of the ceiling rests. In the panels which separate each female figure, unknown artists have painted admirable representations of the glories of the table—salmon, boars' heads, shell-fish, in fact, the whole world of edibles, which by fantastic resemblances recall men, women and children, and which vie with the oddest imaginations of the Chinese; the people who, to my thinking, understand decoration better than any other. Beneath her feet the mistress of the house has a little bell, by which she can call her domestics just at the right moment, without ever fearing that they will interrupt a conversation or derange an attitude. All the embrasures of the windows are of marble mosaics. The room is warmed from beneath. Each window gives a delicious view.

"This room communicates on one side with a bath-room, and on the other with a boudoir which opens into the salon.

"The bath-room is lined with tiles of Sevres porcelain, painted in cameo; the floor is mosaic, and the bath marble. An alcove, concealed by a picture painted upon copper, which turns on a pivot, contains a couch of gilded wood in the ultra-Pompadour style. The ceiling is of lâpis-lazuli, starred with gold. The cameos are painted from designs by Boucher.

"Beyond the salon, which displays all the magnificence of the style of Louis XIV., comes a magnificent billiard-room, which has not, to my knowledge, its equal in Paris. The entrance to this ground-floor is a semi-circular antechamber, at the further end of which is one of the most coquettish of staircases, lighted from above, which leads to rooms which were all built at different epochs. And to think that they cut off the heads of the farmers-general in 1793! How was it possible for them to be so blind as not to understand that the marvels of art are impossible in a country which has no great fortunes, no assured great existences? If the Left feels that it must kill all the kings, why not leave us a few little princes, who are a good deal better than nothing at all.

"These accumulated riches belong at the present time to a little artistic woman, who, not content with having them magnificently restored, takes care of them lovingly. Pretended philosophers, who seem to study humanity, while they are in reality studying themselves, call these beautiful things extravagances. They fall down before the manufactories of calico and the commonplace inventions of modern industry, as if we were greater and happier to-day than in the time of Henri IV., Louis XIV. and Louis XVI., who have all left the seal of their reign at les Aigues. What palaces, what royal chateaux, what great dwellings, what fine works of art, what stuffs brocaded in gold shall we leave behind us? Nowadays we hunt up our grandmothers' skirts, and cover our armchairs with them. We are so selfish and stingy that we level everything with the ground, and plant cabbages where marvels of art once rose. Yesterday the plow passed over Persan, that magnificent domain which gave a title to one of the wealthiest families of the Parisian government;

the hammer has demolished Montmorency, which cost one of the Italians of Napoleon's coterie enormous sums; Val, the creation of Regnaud de Saint Jean d'Angely, and Cassan, built by a mistress of the Prince de Conti, have also disappeared, making four which have gone from the valley of the Oise alone. We are preparing the Campagna of Rome around Paris, in anticipation of an overturning of things, the tempest of which shall blow from the North on our plaster palaces and pasteboard decorations.

"You see, my dear boy, how far the habit of writing bombast for a journal will lead one! I have actually composed an article. Does the mind, like the highway, have its ruts? I must stop, for I am robbing the Government and myself, and I am probably boring you. More to-morrow; I hear the second bell, which announces one of those plentiful dinners that have long since gone out of date in the dining-rooms of Paris.

"The following is the history of my Arcadia. In 1815, there died at les Aigues one of the most famous women of the last century, a cantatrice who had been forgotten by the guillotine and the aristocracy, by literature and by finance, after having had a part in the last three, and barely escaped the first; she was forgotten, as are so many charming old women who take the memory of an adored youth into the country with them, and replace the lost love of the past by the love of nature. Such women live in the flowers, the woodland scents, the skies, and the sunshine, with everything that sings, flutters, shines or grows; with the birds, the lizards, the flowers and the grasses; they do not understand it, they do not analyze it, but they love it; so well, that they forget dukes, marshals, rivalries, and farmers-general, their follies and their effeminate luxury, their precious stones, high-heeled slippers and rouge, for the pleasures of the country.

"I have looked up considerable information concerning the last years of Mademoiselle Laguerre, for I confess that I feel occasionally a little curiosity concerning the old age of such women, much as a child might wonder what becomes of the old moons.

"In 1790, frightened by the aspect of public affairs, Mademoiselle Laguerre came to take up her abode at les Aigues, which had been given her by Bouret. The fate of Du Barry so startled her that she buried all her diamonds. She was then only fifty-three years old; and according to her maid, who afterward married the mayor, 'Madame was more beautiful than ever.' Nature doubtless has its reasons for treating these women like spoiled children; the life of excitement which they lead, instead of killing them, seems to improve their health, and rejuvenate them; beneath a lymphatic appearance they have nerves strong enough to sustain their marvelous physique; and for some mysterious reason, they remain always beautiful.

Mademoiselle Laguerre lived an irreproachable life at les Aigues. When she came there she gave up her former name, and called herself Madame des Aigues, the better to merge her identity in the estate, and she pleased herself by making improvements in the place which were truly artistic. When Bonaparte became first consul, she increased her property by adding some of the church lands to it, purchasing them with her diamonds. As an opera singer knows very little about taking care of her property, she gave up the management of the land to a steward, only busying herself with the park, her flowers, and her fruits.

When this lady was dead and buried at Blagny, the notary of Soulanges (the little village situated between the Ville-aux-Fayes and Blangy, the principal town of the canton) made an elaborate inventory, and finally discovered the singer's heirs, who had been entirely unknown to her. Eleven families of poor peasants in the neighborhood of Amiens went to sleep in rags and awoke one fine morning to find themselves between sheets of gold. The property was sold at auction. Les Aigues was bought by Montcornet, who had saved in Spain and Pomerania enough money for the purchase, which was made for something like eleven hundred thou-

sand francs, including the furniture. The general doubtless felt the influence of these luxurious apartments, and I was telling the countess yesterday that I looked upon her marriage as a direct result of the purchase of les Aigues.

"My dear friend, to appreciate the countess, you must know that the general is a violent, passionate man, five feet nine inches tall, round as a tower, with a thick neck and the shoulders of a blacksmith, which must have amply filled a cuirass. Montcornet commanded the cuirassiers at the battle of Essling, which the Austrians call Gross-Aspern, and almost perished there when the noble corps was driven back toward the Danube. He succeeded in crossing the river astride of an enormous log. The cuirassiers, when they found the bridge was broken, were spurred on by Montcornet's voice to the sublime determination to turn and face the whole Austrian army, who, on the following day, carried off more than thirty wagon-loads of cuirasses. The Germans have invented for these cuirassiers a single word which means 'men of iron.' *

"Montcornet looks like one of the heroes of antiquity. His arms are large and muscular, his chest is broad and deep; his head is of the magnificent leonine type; his voice is fit to command a charge in the heat of battle; but he has no more than ordinary courage, and he lacks intelligence and daring. Like many generals, to whom military good sense, the natural boldness of a man who is always in the midst of danger, and the habit of command, give an appearance of superiority, Montcornet is at first imposing; he is taken for a Titan, but he conceals within him a dwarf, like the pasteboard giant who welcomed Elizabeth at the entrance of Kenilworth Castle. Choleric but good-hearted, and full of imperial pride, he has a soldier's brevity, a prompt repartee, and a hand still more prompt. He was superb on the

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* On principle I object to foot-notes, and this is the first one that I have allowed myself; its historic interest must serve as its excuse; it will furthermore prove that battles may be described otherwise than by the dry terms of technical writers, who for three thousand years have talked only of the right or left wing, or the center, but who do not say a word of the soldier, his heroism and his suffering. The conscientious manner in which I prepared my "Scenes in Military Life" led me to all the battlefields watered by French and foreign blood; and in the course of this pilgrimage I visited the field of Wagram. When I reached the borders of the Danube, opposite Lobau, I saw upon the banks, which were covered with fine grass, undulations similar to those in a field of lucern. I asked the reason for this disposition of the earth, thinking I should receive an answer explaining some method of agriculture. "There," replied the peasant who served as my guide, "there sleep the cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard; those are their graves." The words made me shudder; Prince Frederic de Schwartzenberg, who translated them, added that this was the very peasant who had conducted the convoy of wagons loaded with the cuirasses. By one of those odd coincidences so frequent in war, our guide had also furnished Napoleon's breakfast on the morning of the battle of Wagram. Although he was a poor man, he always kept the double Napoleon which the emperor had given him for his eggs and milk. The curé of Gross-Aspern was our guide to the famous cemetery where French and Austrians fought, in blood up to their knees, with a courage and persistence equally glorious upon either side. He told us that a marble tablet upon which our attention was riveted, and which bore the name of the owner of Gross-Aspern, who was killed on the third day, was the sole recompense awarded to the family; and he added mournfully: "It was a time of great suffering and great promises; but to-day is the time of forgetfulness." These words seemed to me magnificently simple; but when I reflected upon them, I found a reason for the apparent ingratitude of the house of Austria. Neither peoples nor kings are rich enough to reward all the devotion to which great wars give rise. Those who serve a cause with a secret desire for reward set a price upon their blood, and make of themselves *condottieri*. Those who wield the sword or the pen for their country should think only of "doing good," as our fathers said, and should accept glory only as a fortunate accident.

It was when he was on the way to recapture this famous cemetery for the third time, that Massena, wounded, and carried in the box of a wagon, rallied his soldiers with this sublime apostrophe: "What! you rascals, you have only five sous a day, and I have forty millions; will you let me go ahead of you!" The emperor's order of the day, given to his lieutenant, and brought by Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, who swam thrice across the Danube, is well known: "Die, or recapture the village; the army's safety depends upon it. The bridges are broken."—THE AUTHOR.

battlefield, but he is detestable in the household; he knows how to love only with the love of a soldier, whose love-god, according to the ancients, is Eros, the son of Mars and Venus. These delightful chroniclers of religions provided at least a dozen different gods of love, and in studying them, you will discover a most complete social nomenclature; and we think that we invent things! When the globe shall turn, like a sick man in his dreams; when the seas shall become continents, the Frenchmen of that time will find at the bottom of the ocean of to-day a steam-engine, a cannon, a newspaper and a chart, tangled up in the marine plants.

"The Countess de Montcornet is a small, frail, delicate, timid woman. What do you say to such a marriage as that? To a man who knows the world, a well-assorted marriage is the exception. I have come here to see how this little slender woman manages to guide this great big, square general, as he guided his cuirassiers.

"If Montcornet speaks in a loud tone before his Virginie, madame puts her finger on her lips, and he is dumb. The soldier goes to a kiosk, a short distance from the chateau, to smoke his pipe and his cigars, and he returns perfumed. Proud of his subjection, he turns toward her when anything is proposed, as if to say: 'If madame wishes.' When he comes to his wife's room, with that heavy step of his which shakes the pavements as if they had been planks, if she calls out hastily: 'Do not come in!' he makes a military about-face, and says humbly: 'Send for me when I can speak to you,' in the same tones with which, on the Danube, he shouted to his cuirassiers: 'My boys, we must die, and die like men, if there is nothing else to be done.' I heard him say of his wife: 'I not only love her, but I venerate her.' When he gets one of his angry fits, which go beyond all bounds, the little woman goes to her own room and leaves him to have it out; but four or five days later she says to him: 'Do not put yourself in a passion; you might break a blood vessel, to say nothing of the pain which you give me.' And the lion of Essling runs to wipe away a tear. When he comes to the salon where we are talking, she says to him: 'Leave us; he is reading something to me;' and he goes away.

"There is nothing like these great, strong, passionate men, these thunderbolts of war, these Olympian-headed diplomats, these men of genius, for this confidence, this generosity toward feebleness, this faithful protection, this love without jealousy, this good-nature with a wife. Upon my word! I set the science of the countess's managemont of her husband as far above dry and peevish virtues, as the satin of an armchair is preferable to the Utrecht velvet of a dirty bourgeois sofa.

"I have been here six days, and I am never weary of admiring the marvels of this park, surrounded by gloomy forests, whose pretty paths follow the course of the stream. Nature, with its silence and its tranquil joys, has taken poesession of me. This is the true literature; there is never any fault of style in a meadow. True happiness here consists in forgetting everything, even the 'Débats.' Perhaps you can guess that it has rained two mornings since I have been here. While the countess has slept, and Montcornet had been riding about the property, I have kept perforce the promise to write to you, which I so imprudently gave.

"Until now, although I was born in Alençon, and am tolerably well acquainted with the fruits of the earth, the existence of landed property capable of bringing in an income of four or five thousand francs a month has always seemed like a fable to me. Money, for me, is equivalent to four horrible words—work, the bookshops, newspapers and politics. When shall we have a country where money will grow in some pretty landscape? That is my wish for you, in the name of the theater, the press, and book-making. Amen.

"Will Florine be jealous of the late Mademoiselle Laguerre? Our modern Bourets have no longer the French nobility which teaches them to live. They share a box at the opera among three of

them, divide the expenses of a pleasure trip, and no longer cut down magnificent quartos and have them rebound to match the octavos of their library; in fact, they scarcely buy paper-covered books nowadays. What are we coming to?

"Adieu, my friends; do not forget to love Your dear BLONDET."

If this letter, from one of the idlest pens of our time, had not been preserved by a miraculous chance, it would have been impossible to describe les Aigues. And without this description the horrible occurrences which took place there would perhaps be less interesting.

Probably many people expect to see the colonel's cuirass lighted up, and to watch his anger flame out, falling like a thunderbolt upon his little wife, and to meet at the end of the story the domestic tragedy which comes at the end of so many modern dramas. Will the climax take place in this pretty salon, behind its blue cameo doors, where pretty mythological scenes are painted, where beautiful fantastic birds are apparently flying upon the ceiling and the blinds, where china monsters laugh, open-mouthed, upon the mantelpiece; where, on the richest vases, blue dragons wind their tails around the border which the fanciful Japanese have enameled with the most delicate colored lace; where the sofas, the lounges, the mirrors and the étagères inspire that contemplative idleness which takes away all energy?

No, this drama is not confined to private life; it reaches higher—or lower. Do not expect passion; the truth will be only too dramatic. Besides, the historian should never forget that his mission is to do justice to all; the unfortunate and the rich are equal beneath his pen; for him, the peasant has the grandeur of his poverty, as the rich man has the pettiness of his folly; since the rich man has his passions, and the peasant has only his needs, the peasant is doubly poor; and though, politically, his pretensions are pitilessly repressed, humanly and religiously he is sacred.

II.

A BUCOLIC FORGOTTEN BY VIRGIL.

WHEN a Parisian finds himself in the country, he discovers that he is cut off from all his habits, and soon feels the weight of the dragging hours, in spite of the most ingenious efforts of his friends. And in the impossibility of forever talking the nothings of a tete-à-tete, which are so soon exhausted, the hosts say to you tranquilly: "You are getting bored here." In fact, in order to taste the delights of the country one must share in its interests, understand its labors, and its alternate harmony of pain and pleasure, the eternal symbol of human life.

When the power of sleep has once more regained its equilibrium, when the fatigues of the journey have been repaired, and the country customs and habits have been fully mastered, the most difficult moment in life at a chateau, for a Parisian who is neither a sportsman nor an agriculturist, and who wears thin shoes, is the first morning. Between the time of awakening and the breakfast hour, the ladies are either sleeping or making their toilet, and are unapproachable; the master of the house has gone out early to look after his own affairs, and a Parisian therefore finds himself alone from eight o'clock until eleven, which is the almost universal breakfast hour in the country.

Although he lengthens his toilet as much as possible, by way of diversion, he soon loses this resource; he may have brought some work, but he usually puts it back untouched, after having mastered nothing but a knowledge of its difficulties; a writer is then obliged to wander around the park, and gape at the rooks, or count the big trees. Now, the more unconstrained is the life at one of these houses, the more tiresome are these occupations, unless a man belongs to the shaking Quakers, or the honorable body of carpenters or bird-stuffers. If one is obliged, like the landed proprietors, to live in the country, he should fortify himself against ennui by some geological, mineralogical, entomological or botanical hobby; but a

reasonable man does not set up a vice for the sake of getting rid of a fortnight. The most magnificent property, and the most beautiful castles, therefore, become insipid without delay to those who possess only the sight of them. The beauties of nature seem mean and niggardly, compared with their representation at the theater. Paris sparkles then at every facet. Without some particular interest to attach a man, as Blondet was attached, to a place which was "honored by the steps and lighted by the eyes" of some particular person, he would envy the birds their wings, that he might fly away to the constantly moving sights and heart-rending struggles of Paris.

The long letter written by the journalist will reveal to penetrating minds the fact that he had reached that acme of satisfaction attained by certain winged things when they are being fattened for the market, when they remain with their heads sunk in their breasts, without either the wishor the power to taste even the most appetizing food. Thus, when his formidable letter was finished, Blondet felt the need of strolling forth from the gardens of Armida and filling in some manner the mortal blank of the first three hours of the day; for the time between breakfast and dinner belongs to the chatelaine, who knows how to make it fly. To keep a man of intellect, as Madame Montcornet was doing, for a month in the country, without being able to detect a look of ennui on his face, is one of woman's greatest triumphs. An affection which can resist such a trial as that must certainly be lasting. It is difficult to understand why women do not oftener make use of this, as a test of friendship and devotion; it would be impossible for a fool, an egotist, or a man of little mind, to pass through it successfully. Philip II. himself, the Alexander of dissimulation, would have told all his secrets during a month's tete-à-tete in the country. Perhaps that is why kings live in the midst of excitement, and do not give any one the right to see them for more than a quarter of an hour at a time.

Emile Blondet, notwithstanding his Parisian habits, was still capable of enjoying the long-forgotten delights of playing truant. The day after his letter was finished, he caused himself to be awakened by Francois, the head valet, who was detailed for his special service, with the intention of exploring the valley of the Avonne.

The Avonne is the little river which, growing larger above Conches by means of numerous brooks, some of which rise at les Aigues, empties itself at Ville-aux-Fayes into one of the largest of the tributaries of the Seine. The geographical position of the Avonne, which is navigable for shallow craft for about four leagues, gives their true value to the forests of les Aigues, Soulanges and Roquerolles, which are situated on the ridge of the small hills at whose base flows the charming river. The park of les Aigues occupies the greater part of the valley, between the river which is bordered on two sides by the forests of les Aigues, and the great high-road which is defined by old, twisted elms on the horizon, running parallel to the Avonne hills, the first step of the magnificent amphitheater called the Morvan.

However vulgar the comparison may be, it is nevertheless true that the park, thus located in the valley, resembles an immense fish whose head touches the village of Conches, and its tail the bourg of Blangy; for, being longer than it is wide, it spreads out in the middle to a width of nearly two hundred acres, while in the direction of Conches there are scarcely thirty, and toward Blangy about forty. The situation of the place, between three villages, a league from the little town of Soulanges, from which place the first plunge into this Eden is taken, has led to the strife and encouraged the excesses which form the principal interest of the scene. If, seen from the high-road above Ville-aux-Fayes, the paradise of les Aigues causes travelers to commit the sin of envy, what better can be expected of the rich burghers of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, when they have it constantly before their admiring eyes?

This final topographical detail is neces-

sary in order to make the reader understand the situation, and the utility of the four gates by which the park of les Aigues is entered; the grounds are entirely inclosed by walls, except in spots where nature has arranged fine points of view, at which places sunk fences are arranged. These four gates, called the gate of Conches, the Avonne gate, the Blangy gate and the Avenue gate, illustrate so well the genius of the different epochs at which they are constructed, that in the interests of archæology they will be described, but as briefly as Blondet has already described that of the Avenue.

After a week of explorations with the countess, the illustrious reviewer of the "Journal des Débats" knew by heart the Chinese pavilion, the bridges, the islands, the monastery, the chalet, the ruins of the temple, the Babylonian glacier, the kiosks, and all the other inventions of landscape gardeners, which covered a space of perhaps nine hundred acres; he wished therefore to reach the sources of the Avonne, which had been often praised by the general and the countess, but a visit to which, although planned each evening, had been forgotten each morning.

Above the park of les Aigues, the Avonne looks like an Alpine torrent. Here it hollows itself a bed among the rocks; there it buries itself in an immense hollow; now the streams fall abruptly in cascades, and anon it spreads itself out after the fashion of the Loire, flooding the soil and rendering navigation impracticable by reason of its constantly changing channel.

Blondet took the shortest way across the labyrinths of the park to reach the Conches gate. This gate deserves a few words, which will also throw some light on a few historic details connected with the property.

The founder of les Aigues was a younger son of the house of Soulanges, who had made a wealthy marriage, and who wished to make his brother jealous. It is to this sentiment that we owe the fairy-like Isola-Bella, on Lake Maggiore. In the Middle Ages the chateau of les Aigues was situated upon the Avonne. Of this castle nothing now remains but the door, composed of a porch similar to that of fortified cities, and flanked by two pepper-box towers. Above the arch of the porch rises powerful masonry, ornamented with vegetation and pierced by three large window-frames with crossbars. A winding staircase in one of the towers leads to two rooms, and the kitchen is in the second tower. The porch roof, which is pointed, like all old carpentry, is distinguished by two weathercocks, perched at the two ends of a ridge-pole ornamented with odd-shaped ironwork. Many a large place cannot boast of so fine a town-hall. On the outside, the keystone of the arch still shows the escutcheon of the Soulanges, preserved by the hardness of the chosen stone upon which the chisel of the engraver had carved it: Azure, with three staves on a pale, argent; a fesse over all, gules, charged with five crosses, or, aiguise; and it bore the heraldic bar imposed upon younger sons. The device, which Blondet deciphered, was: "I act alone." The gate, which was opened for Blondet by a pretty girl, was of old wood, made heavy with corners of iron. The keeper, awakened by the grinding of the hinges, peeped out of the window and thus showed himself in his night-shirt.

"Ah! are our keepers still asleep at this hour?" thought the Parisian, who believed himself to be well up in forest customs.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought him to the sources of the river, above Conches, and his eyes were charmed by one of those landscapes, the description of which, like the history of France, can be told in one volume or in a thousand. We will content ourselves with a few words.

A projecting rock, covered with dwarf trees, and hollowed at the base by the Avonne, by which combination of circumstances it somewhat resembles an enormous tortoise lying across the water, makes an arch through which can be seen a little sheet of water, clear as a mirror, where the Avonne seems to have fallen asleep, and which ends on the other side in cascades and great rocks, where

little elastic willows sway back and forth constantly with the motion of the water.

Beyond these cascades the sides of the hill are cut as steep as the rocks of the Rhine, and covered with mosses and heather; but, like them, they are slashed with fissures, through which pour here and there boiling white brooks, to which a little meadow, always watered and always green, serves as a cup. In contrast to this wild and solitary scene, the last gardens of Conches show on the other side of the picturesque chaos, at the end of the meadows, together with the remainder of the village, including its church-tower.

There are the few words, but the rising sun, the purity of the air, the dewy sharpness, the concert of woods and waters!—imagine them!

"Upon my word! that is almost as fine as the Opera!" thought Blondet, as he made his way up the Avonne, which was here unnavigable, and whose caprices contrasted finely with the straight, deep, silent channel of the lower Avonne, shaded by the great trees of the forest of les Aigues.

Blondet did not carry his morning walk very far, before he was stopped by one of the peasants who are to play such an important part in this drama that it will perhaps be difficult to know which character has the leading rôle.

When he reached the group of rocks between which the principal source of the river is confined as between two gates, Blondet saw a man whose immobility would have been enough to arouse the curiosity of a journalist, if the figure and dress of the animated statue had not already awakened his interest.

He recognized in this humble personage one of those old men so dear to the pencil of Charlet; he resembled the troopers of this Homer of soldiers by reason of the solidity of a figure well able to endure hardship; his face was reddened, knotty, and discontented. A hat of thick felt, whose brim was held to the crown by stitches, protected his partially bald head from the inclemencies of the weather. From it there fell two locks of hair which a painter would have paid four francs an hour to copy—a dazzling mass of snow, arranged like that of all the classic pictures of the Father. By the way in which the sunken cheeks continued the lines of the mouth, it was easy to guess that the toothless old man was more addicted to the bottle than to the trencher. His thin white beard gave a menacing look to his profile by means of the stiffness of the close-cut hairs. His eyes, too small for his enormous face, and slanting like those of a pig, gave indications of both cunning and idleness; but at this moment they seemed to emit sparks, as they darted upon the river.

The poor fellow's clothing consisted of an old blouse which had once been blue, and trousers made of the coarse burlap which is used in Paris to wrap bales. Any dweller in a city would have shuddered at sight of his broken sabots, without even a wisp of straw to cover the cracks. And certainly his blouse and trousers were of no value to any one except a rag man.

As he examined this Diogenes of the fields, Blondet admitted the possibility of the type of peasants which is seen on old tapestries, old pictures, and old sculptures, and which until then had seemed to him out of the range of anything but fancy. He no longer condemned absolutely the school of ugliness, for he now understood that among men the beautiful is only the flattering exception; a chimera in which man struggles to believe.

"What can be the ideas and the morals of such a being?" thought Blondet, curiously; "of what can he be thinking? Is he like me? We have nothing in common except form, and yet—"

He studied the rigidity peculiar to the tissues of men who live in the open air, and who are accustomed to the inclemencies of the weather, and to the excesses of heat and cold; who are, in fact, used to almost all kinds of hardship, by reason of which their skin is almost like tanned leather, and their nerves serve as an apparatus against physical ills, almost as effectual as that of the Arabs or Russians.

"This is one of Cooper's red-skins," he thought. "There is no need of going to America to see a savage."

Although the Parisian was only a few steps away from him, the old man did not turn his head, but stood looking at the opposite bank with that fixity which the fakirs of India give to their glassy eyes and stiffened joints. Conquered by this species of magnetism, which is more common than might be believed, Blondet finally looked at the water.

"Well, my good man, what are you looking at?" he asked finally, after a good quarter of an hour, during which he had been unable to discover anything which could merit this profound attention.

"Hush!" whispered the old man, making a sign to Blondet not to disturb the air with his voice, "you will frighten it—"

"What?"

"An otter, my good sir. If it should hear us, it would go under water. I am certain that it jumped there; see! there where the water is bubbling. Oh! it is after a fish; but when it comes back again, my boy will get it. You know an otter is one of the rarest things in the world. It is scientific game, and very delicate; they would give me ten francs for it at les Aigues, for the lady fasts there, and to-morrow is fast day. In the old time, the late madame paid me as high as twenty francs, and gave me back the skin. Mouche!" he called in a low voice, "watch carefully."

On the other side of this branch of the Avonne, Blondet now saw two shining eyes like the eyes of a cat, beneath a tuft of alders; then he saw the tanned forehead and tangled hair of a boy of twelve or thereabouts, who was lying flat on his stomach; the boy made a sign to point out the otter, and to let the old man know that he had not lost sight of him. Blondet, falling under the influence of the old man and the boy, allowed himself to be bitten by the demon of the chase.

This demon with two claws, hope and curiosity, leads a man where it will.

"The hat-makers will take the skin," continued the old man. "It is so beautiful, so soft! They cover caps with it."

"Do you think so, my good old man?" asked Blondet, smiling.

"Well, of course, monsieur, you ought to know better than I, although I am seventy years old," replied the old man humbly and respectfully; "and you can perhaps tell me why it is that conductors and wine-merchants are so pleased with them."

Blondet, a master in irony, and already on his guard on account of the word scientific, suspected some mockery on the part of the peasant, but he was reassured by the *naïveté* of his attitude and the stupidity of his expression.

"In my young days we had lots of otters," continued the peasant, "but they have driven them out, until it is as much as we can do to see the tail of one once in seven years, now. And the sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes—perhaps monsieur knows him?—although he is a Parisian, he is a brave young man like yourself, and he loves curiosities. And hearing of my talent for catching otters, for I know them as well as you know your alphabet, he said to me like this, says he: 'Père Fourchon, when you find an otter, bring it to me, and I will pay you well for it,' says he; 'and if it should happen to have some white spots on the back,' says he, 'I will give you thirty francs for it.' That is what he said to me at the gate of Ville-aux-Fayes, as true as I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. There is another wise man at Soulanges, a Monsieur Gourdon, our doctor, who is making, they say, a natural history collection, which has not its like at Dijon; he is the first among the learned men in this part of the country, and he will pay me a handsome price for it. He knows how to stuff men and beasts! And my boy there insists upon it that this otter has some white hairs. 'If that is so,' I said to him, 'the good God wishes us luck this morning.' Do you see the water bubbling there? Oh! there it is. Although it lives in a kind of burrow, it stays for entire days under water. Ah! it heard you then, mon-

sieur; it suspected something; there is no animal more cunning than the otter; it is worse than a woman."

"So you think women are cunning, do you?" said Blondet.

"Oh! monsieur, you have come from Paris, and you ought to know more about that than I do; but you would have done better for us if you had stayed asleep this morning; for, did you see that wake there? it has just gone under— Come, Mouche! the otter heard monsieur, and it may keep us dancing here till midnight; come away. Our thirty francs have swum away."

Mouche rose regretfully; he looked at the place where the water was bubbling, and pointed hopefully toward it. This boy, with his curly hair, and his face as brown as those of the angels in the pictures of the fifteenth century, looked as if he had on breeches, for his trousers stopped at the knees with a fringe of rags ornamented with brambles and dead leaves. This necessary garment was fastened on him by two strings of tow, which took the place of suspenders. A shirt of the same burlap as that of the old man's trousers, but made thicker by coarse darns, showed a sunburned little chest. Mouche's costume was thus even more primitive than that of Père Fourchon.

"They are good fellows in this part of the country," said Blondet to himself; "the people around Paris would have called a man some pretty hard names if he had driven away their game."

And as he had never seen an otter, even at the museum, he was delighted with his little adventure.

"Come!" he said, touched at seeing the old man turning away without asking for anything, "you call yourself a good hunter of otters. If you are sure that the otter is there—?"

From the other side, Mouche pointed with his finger to some bubbles which rose from the depths of the Avonne and burst on its surface in the middle of the basin.

"He has come back there," said Fourchon; "he breathed that time, the beggar! He made those bubbles. How does he contrive to breathe under water? But he is such a rogue, he can get the better even of science."

"Well," continued Blondet, to whom this last remark seemed a joke, due rather to the peasant mind than to the individual, "stay here and catch the otter?"

"And our day, Mouche's and mine?"

"What is your day worth?"

"To both of us? Five francs," replied the old man, looking askance at Blondin, with a hesitation which revealed an enormous overcharge.

The journalist drew ten francs from his pocket, saying—

"Here are ten, and I will give you as many more for the otter."

"And it won't cost you dear at that, if it has white spots; for the sub-prefect told me there wasn't a museum as had one of that kind. He is a learned man, and he knows what he is talking about. He is no fool! If I am after the otter, he, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, is after Monsieur Gaubertin's daughter, who has a fine white spot of a dowry on her back. Here, sir, if I may make so bold, get on to that stone yonder, in the middle of the Avonne. When we have driven the otter out, he will come down with the current, for that is one of the cunning ways of the beast; they go up above their hole to feed, and when they are loaded with their fish, they know that they can easily come down stream. Didn't I tell you they were cunning? If I had taken lessons of them, I should be living on my income to-day. I learned too late in life that it was necessary to go up stream early in the morning in order to find food before others got it. Well, what was to be, is. Perhaps the three of us together can be more cunning than the otter."

"And how, my old magician?"

"Oh! we peasants are so much like the animals that we finally get to understand them. This is how we will do. When the otter wants to go home, we will frighten him here, and you will frighten him there; frightened by all of us, he will make for the bank; if he takes to bare

ground, he is lost. He can't walk. His duck's feet are made for swimming. Oh! it will amuse you; it is a fine game; fishing and hunting at the same time. The general, there where you are stopping, came to see it three days in succession, he was so carried away with it."

Blondet, armed with a whip which the old man cut for him, with instructions to whip the river with it when he gave the word of command, went to his station in the middle of the Avonne, leaping from stone to stone.

"There! that's it, monsieur."

Blondet stopped where he was, and stood there without noticing the flight of time; for, from moment to moment a gesture from the old man made him expect a fortunate denouement; and nothing makes the time pass more quickly than the expectation of quick action which is to succeed the profound silence of watchfulness.

"Père Fourchon," said the boy, softly, when he found himself alone with the old man, "there is really an otter."

"Do you see it?"

"There it is."

The old man was astounded to see under water the red-brown fur of an otter.

"He is coming this way," said the boy.

"Give him a sharp little blow on the head, and throw yourself into the water to hold him down; don't let him go."

Mouche dove into the river like a frightened frog.

"Come, come, my dear monsieur," said Père Fourchon to Blondet, jumping also into the Avonne, after first kicking off his sabots on the bank, "frighten him now! Do you see him? there, toward you!"

The old man ran toward Blondet, beating the water and calling out to him with the serious manner which the country people preserve even in the midst of their greatest excitements:

"Do you see him, there, along the rocks?"

Blondet, who had been placed by the old man in such a position that the sun came full in his eyes, thrashed the water in blind obedience.

"There! there! over by the rocks!" cried Père Fourchon; "the hole is over there, at your left."

Carried away by his excitement, which had only been stimulated by his long waiting, Blondet slipped off of the stone, and stood in the water.

"Carefully, my good sir, carefully! there you are! Ah! twenty good gods! he has gone between your legs! he has gone! he has gone!" said the old man despairingly.

And carried away by the excitement of the hunt, the old peasant waded into the river until he reached Blondet.

"It was all your fault that we lost him," continued Père Fourchon, taking hold of Blondet's hand and emerging from the water like a vanquished Triton. "The beggar is there, under the rocks. He left his fish behind him," he added, looking back to where something was floating upon the water. "We'll have him yet."

Just then a servant in livery, on horseback, and leading another horse by the bridle, came galloping along the Conches road.

"There is one of the people from the castle, who seems to be looking for you," said the man. "If you want to get across the river again, I will give you my hand. Oh! I don't mind getting wet; it will save the trouble of washing."

"And how about rheumatism?" asked Blondet.

"Pshaw!" he replied. "Do you not see that the sun has clothed us, Mouche and me, with a skin as brown as a tobacco pipe? Lean on me, my dear sir. You are from Paris, and you do not know how to balance yourself on our rocks, although you know so many things. If you stay here long, you will learn a great many things in the book of nature, you who, they say, write for the newspapers."

Blondet reached the other bank of the Avonne before Charles, the valet, saw him.

"Ah! monsieur," he exclaimed, "you cannot imagine how uneasy madame was when she heard that you had gone out through the Conches gate. She thinks you are drowned. They have rung the

great bell three times, and called you everywhere in the park, where Monsieur le Curé is still looking for you."

"What time is it, Charles?"

"A quarter of twelve."

"Help me to mount."

"Perhaps monsieur has been taken in by Père Fourchon's otter?" ventured the valet, noticing the water which was dripping from Blondet's boots and pantaloons.

The words enlightened the journalist.

"Don't say a word about it, Charles, and I'll make it right with you," he cried hastily.

"Oh! Monsieur le Comte himself was taken in by that otter," replied the servant. "As soon as a stranger comes to les Aigues, Père Fourchon is on the watch for him, and if the visitor comes to visit the sources of the Avonne, he sells him his otter. He plays it so well that Monsieur le Comte came here three days in succession, and paid him six days for watching the water run."

"And I believed I had seen in Potier, the younger Baptiste, Michot and Monrose, the greatest comedians of the age!" thought Blondet; "what are they beside this beggar?"

"Oh! he knows his little game very well," continued Charles. "He has, besides, another string to his bow, for he calls himself a ropemaker. He has a shop by the wall near the Blangy gate. If you happen to go near his rope, he will get around you so well that he will make you want to turn the wheel and make a little rope for yourself; then he will ask the gratuity due to the master from the apprentice. Madame was taken in by him to the tune of twenty francs. He is the prince of trickery," he ended.

This gossip caused Blondet to indulge in reflections upon the profound astuteness of the peasantry, and to remember all that he had heard from his father, the judge of Alencon, on the subject. Then, recalling all the hidden meanings in the apparently guileless talk of Père Fourchon, he confessed to himself that he had been well taken in by the old Burgundy beggar.

"You would never believe, monsieur," said Charles, as they reached the doorstep, "how necessary it is to be suspicious of everybody in the country, particularly here, where the general is not much liked."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," replied Charles, assuming the air of stupidity beneath which servants know how to shelter their meanings, and which gave Blondet much food for thought.

"There you are, runaway!" said the general, attracted to the door by the sound of the horses' hoofs. "He is here, do not be alarmed," he called to his wife, whose little feet were heard approaching. "Now every one is here except the Abbé Brossette; go and look for him, Charles," he added to the servant.

III.

THE WINE-SHOP.

THE Blangy gate was built by Bouret, and consisted of two rough-hewn pilasters, each surmounted by a dog sitting on his haunches and holding an escutcheon between his two forepaws. As the steward's cottage was in the immediate vicinity, the financier had not been obliged to build a porter's lodge. Between the two pilasters an elegant gate, like those forged in the time of Buffon for the Jardin des Plantes, opened upon a paved causeway, which led to the high-road, formerly kept carefully in order by les Aigues and the house of Soulanges, and which connected Conches, Cerneux, Blangy, Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes like a garland, for the whole road was lined with estates surrounded by flowering hedges, and little houses covered with rose trees, honeysuckle and climbing plants.

There, beside a pretty wall which extended as far as a sunk fence, where the chateau grounds fell abruptly down the valley, as far as Soulanges, could be found the rotten posts, the old wheel and the forked stakes which constituted the workshop of the village ropemaker.

About half past twelve, while Blondet was sitting at table opposite the Abbe Brossette, and listening to the caressing reproaches of the countess, Père Fourchon and Mouche arrived at their establishment, where the old man, under pretext of making rope, could keep a watch on les Aigues, and see who went out or in. Thus nothing could escape the watchfulness of the old man—open blinds, tete-a-tete walks, or the smallest incidents in the life of the chateau. He had only set up this business within the last three years, but this circumstance had not as yet been noticed, either by the keepers, the masters, or the servants of les Aigues.

"Go around by the Avonne gate while I go and put away the things," said Père Fourchon, "and when you have done the talking, they will probably send to the Grand-I-vert for me, where I am going for a little refreshment; for it makes me terribly thirsty to be under water like that. If you do as I have just told you, you will probably hook on to a good breakfast; try and get a word with the countess, and give a slap at me, so that they will want to come and preach to me. There are plenty of good glasses of wine to be got out of it."

After these instructions, which were rendered almost superfluous by Mouche's sly appearance, the old rope-maker, holding his otter under his arm, disappeared upon the high-road.

Halfway between the gate and the village there was, at the time of Emile Blondet's visit to les Aigues, one of those houses which can be found only in France, where stones are rare. The pieces of brick picked up here and there, the great pebbles inserted like diamonds in the clayey earth which formed the solid, though time-eaten walls, the roof held up by great branches and covered with rushes and straw, the thick shutters, and the door, all bore evidence of lucky finds or treasures begged.

The peasant has for his dwelling the same instinct that the animal has for its nest or burrow, and this instinct shone forth in all the arrangements of the cottage. In the first place, the window and door faced the north. The house, placed on a little rise of ground in the most gravelly part of a vineyard, was necessarily healthy. The ascent to it was by means of three steps which had been laboriously made of stakes and planks, and filled in with little stones. The drainage was therefore good. Then, as rain in Burgundy rarely comes from the north, no dampness could rot the foundations, although they were slightly built. Below, a rustic paling bordered the path, which was covered with a hedge of hawthorn and sweet-brier. A trellis, beneath which some rickety tables, flanked by long benches, invited the passers-by to sit down, covered with its canopy the space which separated the cottage from the road. On the bank by the house grew roses, wall-flowers, violets, and other of the more common flowers. A honeysuckle and a jasmine threw their tendrils up to the roof, which was already covered with moss, notwithstanding its recent date.

At the right of the house the owner had put up a stable for two cows. There was a space of trodden earth before this wretched building, and in one corner was an enormous heap of dung. On the other side of the house and the trellis stood a thatched shed, supported by trunks of trees, under which were stored the vine-dressers' tools and their empty casks; and fagots of wood were piled around the hump of earth which formed the oven, whose mouth, in peasants' houses, almost always opens beneath the mantel-piece.

Belonging to the house was about an acre of land, surrounded by a quick-set hedge, and planted with vines, as well cared for as those of most peasants, which are so well planted, manured and dug about, that their branches grow green before any others for three leagues around. A few trees, almonds, plums and apricots, showed their delicate heads in this inclosure. Between the rows were planted potatoes and beans. On the side toward the village, and behind the little courtyard, there was another small piece of ground, low and moist, which was favorable for the growth of cabbages and

onions, vegetables which are favorites with the laboring classes; the place was closed by a railed gate, through which the cows passed, trampling the earth and covering it with dung.

This house, composed of two rooms on the ground-floor, was entered through the vineyard. On that side a wooden staircase, fastened to the wall of the house and covered with a thatched roof, led to the garret, which was lighted by a round window. Beneath this rustic staircase a cellar, made of Burgundy bricks, contained several casks of wine.

Although the cooking utensils of the peasant usually consist of two articles, with which every kind of cooking is done, namely, a frying-pan and an iron pot, exceptions to this rule, in the shape of two great saucepans, hung beneath the mantel-piece above a small portable stove, were to be found in this cottage. But in spite of this indication of comfortable circumstances, the furniture was in harmony with the outside of the hut. There was a jar to hold the water; the spoons were of wood or pewter; the dishes of clay, brown without and white within, showed traces of having been broken and mended; there was a solid table, with chairs of white wood, and the floor was of hard earth. Every five years the walls received a coating of whitewash, as well as the narrow beams of the ceiling, from which hung hams, strings of onions, bundles of candles, and the bags in which peasants put their seeds; near the kneading-trough an old cupboard of black walnut held the scanty linen, the change of clothes, and the Sunday garments of the family.

Over the mantel shone an old poacher's gun; it was apparently not worth five francs; the wood was scorched, and the barrel looked as if it had never been cleaned. It would seem that a cabin which was fastened with nothing but a latch, and whose outer gate, cut in the palings, was never shut, would require nothing better in the way of defense, and that the weapon was useless. But in the first place, while the wood was of the cheapest, the barrel, carefully chosen, came from a valuable gun, one that was doubtless given to some gamekeeper. And the owner of this gun never missed his aim. There existed between him and his weapon that intimate acquaintance which the workman has with his tool. If his gun needs to be raised or lowered the thousandth part of an inch, because it carries just a trifle above or below the aim, the poacher knows it, and unfailingly obeys this law. The essential parts of this weapon were in good condition, but that was all. In everything which is necessary to him, and which can be of use to him, the peasant employs the required amount of energy; but he does not strive for anything that is not absolutely necessary. He never understands exterior perfection. He is an infallible judge of necessities, and knows just what degree of strength he must exert; and when he is working for others, he understands how to give the least possible labor for the most possible value. This apparently contemptible gun was one of the important factors in the existence of the family, as will be seen later.

Has the reader taken in all the details of this hut, which was set down not more than five hundred feet from the pretty gate of les Aigues? Does he see it, crouched there like a beggar before a palace? But its roof, covered with velvety mosses, its clucking hens, its wallowing pig, and its straying heifer, all these rural poems had a horrible meaning. At the gate in the paling, a great pole held up a withered bouquet, composed of three pine branches and an oak bough, tied with a rag. Above the door a roving artist had earned his breakfast by painting on a white background, two feet square, a huge capital "I" in green, and for the benefit of those who knew how to read, this pun: "Au Grand-I-vert (hiver)." On the left of the door was a rude sign, bearing in bright colors the words: "Good March beer," together with the picture of a foaming pot of the beer, on one side of which was a woman in an exceedingly décolleté dress, and on the other a hussar, both highly colored. Thus, in spite of the flowers and the country air, the cottage

breathed forth the same strong and nauseating odor of ardent spirits and food which is noticeable in Paris in passing the cheap eating houses of the faubourg.

So much for the place; now for the inmates and their history, which contains more than one lesson for philanthropists.

The proprietor of the Grand-I-vert, named Francois Tonsard, commends himself to the attention of philosophers by the manner in which he solved the problem of life in such a manner as to make idleness profitable, and industry unnecessary.

Being a Jack at all trades, he knew how to work, but he did it for himself alone. For others, he dug ditches, gathered fagots, peeled the bark from trees or cut them down. In these employments, the employer is at the mercy of the workman.

Tonsard owed his little corner to the generosity of Mademoiselle Laguerre. In his early youth he had worked by the day for the gardener at the chateau, for there was not anywhere his equal for trimming the trees and hedges and horse-chestnuts. His very name indicates an hereditary talent in this direction. In remote country places privileges exist which are obtained and preserved with as much art as merchants employ in acquiring theirs. One day when she was out walking, madame heard Tonsard, then a good-looking young fellow, say: "An acre of ground would make me perfectly happy." The good woman, who delighted in making others happy, gave him the acre of vineyard beside the Blangy gate, in return for a hundred days' work (a delicacy which was very little understood); he was at the same time allowed to live at les Aigues, where he fraternized with the servants at the chateau, who soon pronounced him the best fellow in Burgundy.

Poor Tonsard, as everybody called him, worked about thirty days of the allotted hundred; the rest of the time he idled away.

When he was fairly in possession of his land, Tonsard said to the first one who alluded to it as a gift:

"I have bought it and paid for it. Do the great folks ever give us anything? Is a hundred days' work nothing? It cost me three hundred francs, and it is all stony ground."

But he never said that to any one outside of his own class.

Tonsard then built his house himself, taking materials here and there, making every one give him a helping hand, gleaning discarded rubbish from the chateau, and always getting what he asked for. A defective door, which had been broken up in order to be carried off, served him as a door to his stable. The window came from an old hot-house. Thus the débris from the chateau served to build this fatal hut.

Saved from conscription by Gaubertin, the steward of les Aigues, whose father was prosecuting-attorney for the department, Tonsard married as soon as his house was finished and his vine in a condition to bear. The rogue, twenty-three years old, who was on intimate terms at les Aigues, to whom madame had just given an acre of ground, and who had the appearance of being industrious, was artful enough to make a great show with his negative values, and he obtained for a wife the daughter of a tenant on the estate of Ronquerolles, beyond the forest of les Aigues.

This farmer rented half a farm, which was going to ruin in his hands, for want of a wife. Being a widower, and inconsolable, he tried, after the English fashion, to drown his sorrows in wine; but when he had succeeded in forgetting his dear dead wife, he found that he had espoused the wine-cup instead. In a short time the father-in-law ceased to be a farmer, and became once more a common laborer; but he was a drunken, idle workman, quarrelsome and vindictive, capable of anything, like all of the lower class who, from a state of comparative affluence, return once more to poverty. This man, who, by his practical knowledge and his reading and writing, was above the other workmen, but who was held by his vices to the level of pauperism, had just measured wits, as we have seen, with one of the most spirituel men of Paris.

Père Fourchon, who was first a schoolmaster at Blangy, lost his place on account of misconduct and heterodox ideas upon public instruction. He was more in the habit of helping the children to make little boats and playthings with their alphabet books than of teaching them to read; he scolded them in such a peculiar manner when they had stolen fruit, that his reprimands might have passed for lessons upon the best method of scaling the walls.

From schoolmaster he beame postman. In this position, which is the refuge of so many old soldiers, Père Fourchon was continually getting into trouble. Now he forgot the letters in the wine-shops, and now he neglected to deliver them. When he was drunk, he sent the mail for one commune to another, and when he was sober he read the letters. He was therefore promptly dismissed.

Failing to hold any position in the State, Père Fourchon finally became a manufacturer. In the country every one works at something, and all have at least the appearance of being industrious and honest. At the age of sixty-eight, the old man undertook the trade of rope-maker on a small scale. It is one of those industries which require very little capital. The workshop is, as we have seen, the nearest convenient wall; the machines are worth scarcely ten francs, and the apprentice, like his master, sleeps in a barn, and lives on whatever he can pick up. The rapacity of the law in the matter of doors and windows expires *sub dio*. The materials for the first bit of rope can easily be borrowed.

But the principal revenues of Père Fourchon and his apprentice Mouche came from their otter hunts, and from the breakfasts or dinners which were given them by those people who, not knowing how to read or write, made use of Père Fourchon's talents in the case of a letter to be written or a bill to be rendered. Furthermore, he knew how to play the clarionet, and accompanied one of his friends, called Vermichel, the fiddler of Soulanges, to the village weddings, or to the great balls at the *Tivoli* of Soulanges.

Vermichel was named Michel Vert; but the transposition was so generally used that Brunet, the clerk of the justice of the peace of Soulanges, put it: "Michel Jean Jerome Vert, called Vermichel, practitioner." Vermichel, who was distinguished as a violinist in the old regiment of Burgundy, in gratitude for services which Père Fourchon rendered him procured for him the appointment of practitioner, or witness, which devolved upon those in the country who could sign their names. Père Fourchon served as witness, therefore, for judiciary acts, when the Sieur Brunet came to administer justice in the communes of Cerneux, Conches and Blangy. Vermichel and Fourchon, allied by twenty years of tippling together, might almost be considered a business firm.

Mouche and Fourchon, allied by vice, as Mentor and Telemachus formerly were by virtue, journeyed, like them, in search of bread, "*panis angelorum*," the only Latin words which the old man remembered. They went about, picking up the remnants and scrapings from the Grand-I-vert and the neighboring chateaux; for both of them together, in their busiest and most prosperous years, had not made more than three hundred and sixty fathoms of rope. In the first place, no merchant within a radius of twenty leagues would trust Fourchon and Mouche with tow for their rope. The old man, improving on the miracles of modern chemistry, knew too well the process of changing tow into the blessed juice of the vine. Besides, he excused himself by saying that his triple functions of public writer for three townships, witness for the justice of the peace, and clarionet player, left him no time for the development of his business.

Thus Tonsard was at once undeceived in his hope of acquiring comfort and property by means of his marriage. The idle son-in-law, by an ordinary accident, encountered a good-for-nothing father-in-law. Affairs became still more complicated since Tonsard, who was endowed with a kind of rustic beauty, being tall and well-made, did not like to work in the

open air. He therefore took his wife to task for her parent's failures, by reason of that vengeance common among peasants, whose eyes, solely occupied by the effect, are rarely lifted to the cause.

The woman found her chain too heavy, and sought to lighten it. She made use of Tonsard's vices to make herself mistress of him. He was a gourmand, and he loved his ease, and she encouraged him in his idleness and gluttony. In the first place, she knew how to obtain favors from the chateau, and Tonsard never troubled himself with inquiring into the means as long as he enjoyed the results. He cared very little what his wife did, so long as she did what he required of her. Tonsard's wife therefore set up the wine-shop of the Grand-I-vert, whose first patrons were the domestics of les Aigues, the guards and the chasseurs.

Gaubertin, Mademoiselle Laguerre's steward, one of Madame Tonsard's best friends, gave her a few casks of excellent wine to start her business. The effect of these presents, and the celebrated beauty of the woman, gave the Grand-I-vert a fine start. Being a lover of good eating, La Tonsard was naturally a good cook, and although her talents were exercised only upon the commoner country dishes, such as stewed rabbit, game sauce, fish stew and omelet, she had the reputation in the country round about for knowing how to cook a dinner fit to make one's mouth water, seasoned with plenty of spices, to make a man thirsty. By the end of two years, she had thus obtained complete ascendency over Tonsard, and pushed him to evil courses, in which he was only too willing to indulge.

The rascal poached constantly, with perfect impunity, and as soon as his children were big enough he made them useful, without showing himself at all scrupulous as to their morals. He had two daughters and two sons. Tonsard, who, like his wife, lived from hand to mouth, might have soon come to the end of his joyous life, if he had not constantly maintained in his house the quasi-martial law of working for the preservation of his comfort, which all the family obeyed. When they were fairly grown up, at the expense of others, the following rules and regulations were in force at the Grand-I-vert.

Tonsard's old mother, and his two daughters, Catherine and Marie, went twice a day to the woods, and returned bowed down beneath the weight of a bundle of fagots which drooped to their ankles and came two feet out beyond their heads. Although the outer layer was of dry wood, the inside was composed of green wood, often cut from the young trees. Literally, Tonsard took all his winter fire-wood from the forest of les Aigues. The father and the two sons poached continually. From September to March, hares, rabbits, partridges, and deer, all the game which they did not eat themselves, was sold at Blangy, in the little town of Soulanges, the chief town in the canton, where Tonsard's two sons furnished milk, and whence they brought back news each day, in return for that which they peddled concerning les Aigues, Cerneux and Conches. In the months when they could not hunt, they set traps; and if the traps yielded more than sufficient for their own needs, the wife made game pies and sent them to Ville-aux-Fayes. In the harvest time the seven of them—the old mother, the two boys, until they were seventeen years old; the two daughters, old Fourchon, and Mouche—gleaned and brought in about sixteen bushels a day, of rye, barley and wheat, all good to be ground.

The two cows, which were taken by the youngest girl to browse along the roads, usually escaped into the fields of les Aigues; but as, at any trespass which was so flagrant as to oblige the keepers to take notice of it, the children were either beaten or deprived of food, they soon acquired remarkable dexterity in hearing the footsteps of the enemy, and they were rarely caught. The beasts, led by long ropes, obeyed willingly a single twitch of recall, or a particular cry which brought them back to their lawful pasture; they came all the more willingly because they knew that when the peril was passed they would be allowed to

return once more to the neighboring meadows.

Old mother Tonsard, who grew more and more feeble, took Mouche's place, since Fourchon kept the boy with him, under the pretext of caring for his education. Marie and Catherine made hay in the woods; they knew where to find the best forest-grass, and they cut, spread, raked and garnered it, finding there two thirds of the food which their cows required in winter; leading them, besides, on fine days, to sheltered places where the grass was yet green. There are, in certain places in the valley of les Aigues, as in all countries which are overlooked by ranges of mountains, places which, as in Piedmont and Lombardy, give grass in winter. These meadows, called in Italy *marciti*, are of great value; but in France they are threatened with too much ice and snow. This phenomenon is doubtless due to some particular location, and to infiltrations of water, which keep the ground at a warm temperature.

The two calves brought in about eighty francs. The milk, allowing for the time when the cows were dry or were calving, brought about a hundred and sixty francs, besides supplying their own family with milk. Tonsard earned about a hundred and fifty more by odd jobs.

The food and the wine which they sold gave a net profit of about three hundred francs, for the drinking-bouts only came at certain seasons, and Tonsard and his wife, being warned of them beforehand, went to the town for the wine and provisions needed for the occasion. The wine from Tonsard's vineyard was sold usually for twenty francs a cask, the cask to be returned; a wine-house keeper of Soulanges, a friend of Tonsard's, bought it.

On certain plentiful years, Tonsard realized twelve caskfuls from his vineyard, but the average yield was eight, of which Tonsard kept half for himself. In the vine country, the gleanings of the vineyards give good perquisites, and by this means the Tonsard family realized about three casks more of wine. But this family had no conscience whatever; they entered the vineyards before the harvesters left them, and they rushed into the wheat fields while the heaped-up sheaves were still awaiting the cart.

Thus the seven or eight casks of wine, as much stolen as cultivated, sold for quite a sum. But out of this sum, a considerable part had to go for the support of Tonsard and his wife, who both wanted the best of everything to eat, and the best of wine to drink—better, in fact, than that which they sold, since it was furnished them in payment for their own. The money brought in by this family, therefore, amounted to about nine hundred francs, for they fattened two pigs every year, one for their own use, and another to sell.

The laborers, the profligates of the country, felt a certain amount of affection for the cabaret of Grand-I-vert, both on account of the culinary talents of Tonsard's wife, and because of the good fellowship existing between this family and the lesser people of the valley. The two daughters were both remarkably beautiful. And besides all else, the ancient date of the establishment, which went back to 1795, made it a sacred thing in the country. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, the workmen came there to conclude their bargains, and to learn the latest news gathered by Tonsard's daughters, by Mouche, and by Fourchon, and told by Vermichel and by Brunet, the most celebrated official in Soulanges, when he came in search of his witness. There were established the prices of hay and wine, of day-labor, and that done by the job. Tonsard, the sovereign judge in these matters, gave his opinions, while drinking with the others. Soulanges passed throughout the country-side for being a town of society and gayety, and Blangy was the commercial borough, although it was crushed by the great center of Ville-aux-Fayes, which had become in twenty-five years the capital of this magnificent valley. The market of animals and grains was held at Blangy, on the market-place, and the price there served as an index for all the country around.

By reason of remaining always in the house, Madame Tonsard had remained

fresh and white and plump, in contrast to the women who worked in the fields, and who faded as rapidly as the flowers, and were old women at thirty. Madame Tonsard liked to look well. She was only neat, but in a village this quality is in itself a luxury. The daughters, better dressed than their station warranted, followed their mother's example. Beneath their dress skirt, which was relatively elegant, they wore linen which was finer than that of the richest peasants. On fête days they appeared in pretty dresses which they obtained Heaven knows how! The servants at les Aigues sold to them at low prices dresses which the ladies-maids had cast off, and which, after having swept the streets of Paris, had come into the possession of Marie and Catherine, and shone triumphantly beneath the sign of the Grand-I-vert. These two girls, the bohemians of the valley, did not receive a cent from their parents, who gave them nothing but their food and their wretched beds.

Although every one knew that the family had no principles, no one ever took the trouble to try and convert them. At the outset it may be explained, once for all, that the morality of the peasant is at a low ebb. The children, until they are taken by the State, are nothing but so much capital. Self-interest, particularly since 1789, has become their sole motive; they never stop to question whether an action is legal, but only whether it is profitable. An absolutely honest man, among the peasantry, is the exception. The reason for this state of things may be found in the fact that the peasants live a purely material life, which approaches as nearly as possible to the ultra-primitive; and their labor, while bowing them down physically, takes away their purity of thought.

Mingling in all interests, Tonsard listened to every one's complaints, and arranged those frauds which would benefit the needy. His wife, who was a good-looking woman, had a good word for the evil-doers of the country, and never refused her approbation and help to anything that was undertaken against the "bourgeois." And thus in this cabaret, which was like a nest of vipers, was nourished the living, venomous, warm and stirring hate of the workingman and the peasant for the master and the rich man.

The comfortable life led by the Tonsards was therefore a very bad example. Each one asked himself why he, like the Tonsards, should not take his wood for the fire, the cook-stove, and the winter fuel from the forest of les Aigues? Why should he not have pasturage also for his cow, and snare game to eat or to sell? Why should he not garner, without sowing, the harvest and the grape? Thus the cunning theft which ravages the woods, and decimates the fields, the meadows and the vines, became general in the valley, and soon grew to be a right in the communes of Blangy, Conches and Cerneux, which bordered upon the domain of les Aigues. This plague-spot, for reasons which will be told in their time and place, did more harm to the domains of les Aigues than to the property of Ronquerolles and Soulanges.

It must not be supposed that Tonsard, his wife, his old mother and his children ever said to themselves deliberately, "We will live by theft, and we will do it as cleverly as possible." Such habits grow slowly. To the dead wood the family at first added one or two sticks of green; then, emboldened by the habit, and their immunity from detection, which was a necessity to the plans which this story will develop, in the course of twenty years they had reached the point of calling it "their wood," and of stealing all they needed. The pasturage of the cows, and the abuse of the privileges of gleaning and harvesting, also grew by degrees. When once this family, together with the other do-nothings of the valley, had thus tasted the benefits of these four rights which had been wrested from the rich, and which amounted to pillage, it will be readily seen that nothing short of a force superior to their own audacity would compel them to give them up.

At the time of the beginning of this story Tonsard was about fifty years old. He was a large, strong man, rather fat, with curly black hair, a very red face, streaked,

like a brick, with violet veins; his eyes were reddened, and his ears were large and flabby; his constitution was muscular, but he was enveloped in soft flesh; his forehead was flattened, and his lower lip hung down; he concealed his true character beneath a stupidity which was occasionally mingled with flashes of experience that resembled intelligence, partly because he had acquired a habit of bantering talk, much affected by Vermichel and Fourchon. His nose, which was flattened at the end, as if the finger of God had marked him, gave to his voice tones which came from the palate, as in those in whom some illness has closed communication between the nasal passages, through which the air passes with difficulty. His upper teeth, which overlapped each other, showed this defect (called terrible by Lavater) all the more plainly since his teeth were as white as those of a dog. Beneath the easy good-nature of a lazy man, and the carelessness of the drunkard, this man was frightful.

Tonsard's portrait, together with a description of his shop and his father-in-law, occupy a prominent place, because such a place is due to the man, the cabaret, and the family. In the first place, this existence, which has been so minutely described, is the type of that of hundreds of others in the valley of les Aigues. Then again, Tonsard, without being more than the instrument of active and deep hatred, was destined to have an active and enormous influence in the battle that was about to be waged; for he was counsel for all the complainants of the lower class. His wine-shop served as a rendezvous for the assailants, and he became their chief, in consequence of the terror which he inspired in the valley, not so much because of his actions as because of what it was feared he might do. The threats of this poaching rascal were as effective as deeds, and he was never obliged to execute any of them.

Every revolt, whether open or secret, has its banner. The banner of the marauders, the do-nothings and the drunkards was this terrible roost of the Grand-I-vert. It was a place where amusement was to be found, and that is something as rare in the country as in the city. There was no other inn for a space of four leagues on the high-road which loaded wagons could easily travel in the space of three hours; therefore all those on the way from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes stopped at the Grand-I-vert, if only for refreshment. And finally, the miller of les Aigues, who was deputy to the mayor, came there with his boys. Even the domestics at the great house did not disdain to frequent the place, and so the Grand-I-vert communicated in an underhand and secret way with the chateau, through its people, and knew all that they knew. It is impossible, either for love or money, to break the understanding that exists between the domestic and the people. He comes from the people, and is firmly attached to them.

This comradeship will serve to explain the reticence of the groom, Charles, when he replied to Blondet, as they reached the steps before the house.

IV.

ANOTHER IDYLL.

"AH! by all that's holy! papa," said Tonsard, as he saw his father-in-law enter, and suspected him of being hungry; "your mouth is open early this morning. We have nothing to give you. And what about that rope that you were going to make us? It is astonishing how much you can promise to make over night, and how little of it is done in the morning. You ought to have made one long ago that would have gone about your own neck, for you cost altogether too much."

The pleasantries of the peasant and the laborer are Attic in their simplicity; they consist in telling his whole mind, with grotesque exaggerations. It is not so very different in the salons. Delicacy of wit takes the place of grossness, but that is all.

"Come! none of that!" said the old man; "let us talk business. I want a bottle of your best wine."

So saying, Fourchon tapped with a five-franc piece, which shone brilliantly in his hand, upon the rickety table at which he was seated, whose greasy covering, black scorches, wine stains and gashes, made it a curiosity. At the sound of the money, Marie Tonsard, dressed as trimly as a corvette ready for the chase, cast upon her grandfather a sly look which flashed from her blue eyes like a spark. Her mother also came out of the next room, attracted by the chink of the metal.

"You are always abusing my poor father," she said to Tonsard; "but he brings in a good deal of money in the course of the year; God grant he comes by it honestly! Let's see it," she added, darting suddenly upon the money, and snatching it from Fourchon's hand.

"Marie," said Tonsard gravely, "go and get some of the bottled wine from above the plank."

In the country, the wine is only of one quality, but it is sold as two kinds, cask wine and bottled wine.

"Where did that come from?" asked Madame Tonsard, slipping the coin into her pocket.

"Philippine, you will come to a bad end," said the old man, shaking his head, but not attempting to recover the money.

He had doubtless long since recognized the futility of a struggle between his terrible son-in-law, his daughter, and himself.

"This makes another bottle that you have sold for five francs," he said bitterly; "but it will be the last. I shall give my custom to the Café de la Paix."

"Hold your tongue, father," replied the fat, white daughter, who looked like a Roman matron; "you need a shirt, and a suitable pair of trousers, and another hat, and I want to see a waistcoat on you."

"I have told you before now that that would be my ruin!" exclaimed the old man. "I should look as if I were rich, and no one would give me anything."

The bottle, which was just then brought by the blonde Marie, put a stop to the eloquence of the old man, who was not without that trait, peculiar to those whose language permits them to say everything, without stopping at the expression of any thought, no matter how atrocious.

"Then you won't tell us where you hooked the money?" demanded Tonsard. "We might go and get some too."

While he finished a snare that he was making, the ferocious innkeeper was eying his father-in-law's pantaloons, and he soon discovered the round protuberance whose dirty circle betrayed the presence of the second five-franc piece.

"To your health! I am becoming a capitalist," said Père Fourchon.

"If you wanted to, you could be," said Tonsard. "You have chances enough. But the devil has put a hole in your head through which everything runs away."

"Oh! I just played the otter trick on that fellow at Aigues, who has just come from Paris; that's all."

"If many people came to see the sources of the Avonne, you would get rich, grandpa," said Marie.

"Yes," he replied, draining his bottle; "but I have played with the otters so long, they are getting angry, and I actually caught one to-day, for which I am to get more than twenty francs."

"I'll wager, papa, that you made an otter out of tow?" said his daughter, looking at him with a wink.

"If you will give me some trousers, and a waistcoat and some list suspenders, so that Vermichel may not be ashamed of me on our platform at Tivoli, where Père Socquard is always scolding about me, I will leave that money with you, my daughter, for that idea is well worth it. Perhaps I might work that fellow at Aigues again with it, for he seems as if he might make a business of otters."

"Go and get another bottle for us," said Tonsard to his daughter. "If he had an otter, really, your father would show it to us," he added, addressing his wife, and trying to excite the spirit of contradiction in Fourchon.

"I am too much afraid of seeing him in your frying-pan," replied the old man, winking one of his little greenish eyes askance at his daughter. "Philippine has already cabbaged my money; I

should like to know how many pieces of money you have already cheated me out of, under pretense of feeding and clothing me. And you to tell me that my mouth is always open for something to eat! and I never have anything to wear."

"You sold your last clothes for boiled wine at the Café de la Paix," said his daughter; "for Vermichel, who tried to stop you—"

"Vermichel! the man I treated! Vermichel is incapable of betraying a friend. It must have been rather that old hundredweight of lard on two feet whom he is not ashamed to call his wife!"

"He or she," replied Tonsard, "or Bonnebault."

"If it was Bonnebault," cried Fourchon, "one of the pillars of the café—I—he— It is enough!"

"But, you old sot, what has that got to do with selling your clothes? You sold them because you wanted to; you are of age," said Tonsard, slapping the old man on the knee. "Come, do honor to my wine, and wet your whistle. My wife's father has a right to it, and had much better take it than carry good money to Socquard."

"To think that you have been fiddling for folks at Tivoli for fifteen years, and haven't guessed Socquard's secret of the boiled wine, you who are so cunning," said the daughter. "You know very well that with that secret we should be as rich as Rigou."

In the Morvan, and in that part of Burgundy which lies at its feet on the side toward Paris, this cooked wine, of which Madame Tonsard spoke, is a rather expensive beverage which plays an important part in the lives of the peasants, and is made by all grocers and coffee-house keepers, wherever there are cafés. This chosen liquor, composed of good wine, sugar, cinnamon and other spices, is preferred to all the disguises or mixtures of brandy called ratafia, hundred and seventy, water of braves, black currant, vespétro, spirit of sunshine, and the like. It is found as far as the frontiers of France and Switzerland. In the Jura, in those wild places where only a few tourists penetrate, the innkeepers give the name of wine of Syracuse to this industrial product, which is excellent, and for which those who find a ravenous appetite by ascending the mountains willingly pay three or four francs a bottle.

In the households of the Morvan and of Burgundy, the slightest ailment, the least disarrangement of the nerves, is a pretext for drinking boiled wine. Before and after confinement the women take it, with the addition of burned sugar. It has devoured peasant fortunes, and it has, therefore, more than once necessitated marital correction.

"Oh! there's no way of getting that secret," said Fourchon. "Socquard always shuts himself up when he cooks his wine. He did not even tell the secret to his late wife. He gets all his materials from Paris."

"Don't bother your father," cried Tonsard. "He doesn't know, and that is all there is of it. A man cannot know everything."

Fourchon became alarmed when he saw his son-in-law's face and speech beginning to soften.

"What do you want to steal from me now?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't take anything but what belongs to me," replied Tonsard; "if I take anything from you, it amounts to no more than the payment of the dowry you promised me."

Fourchon, reassured by this brutality, lowered his head like a man conquered and convinced.

"There is a pretty snare," continued Tonsard, approaching his father-in-law and placing the snare on his knees; "they need game at les Aigues, and if we have any luck, we will furnish it to them."

"That is good, solid work," replied the old man, examining the mischievous machine.

"Leave us alone to pick up the sous, papa," said his daughter. "We shall have our share in the cake of les Aigues!"

"Oh! the chatterboxes," said Tonsard. "If I am ever hung, it will not be for

shooting a man, but on account of your daughter's tongue."

"And do you really suppose that les Aigues will be cut up in pieces and sold for your benefit?" replied Fourchon. "During the twenty years that Père Rigou has been sucking the marrow of your bones, haven't you learned that the middle-class folks would be worse than the nobles? When that affair happens, my children, the Soudrys, the Gaubertins and the Rigous will make you dance on air to the tune of 'I have good snuff and you have none,' which is the national air of the rich. The peasant will always be a peasant. Can't you see (but you don't understand politics) that the Government put such heavy taxes on wine, just for the sake of pinching us and keeping us poor? The bourgeois and the Government are all one. What would become of them if we were to get rich? Would they work in the fields? would they reap the harvest? They must have poor people. I was rich for ten years, and I know what I thought of beggars."

"But we must hunt with them," said Tonsard, "because they are going to portion off the great estates; afterward we can turn against them. If I had been in the place of Courtecuisse, whom Rigou is ruining, I should long ago have settled his account with other metal than that which the poor fellow is giving him."

"You are right," replied Fourchon. "As Father Niseron, who remained a Republican after every one else, said: 'The people are tough; they do not die; there is time enough for them.'"

Fourchon fell into a reverie, and Tonsard took advantage of it to recover his snare; but when he took it, he cut a gash in Père Fourchon's trousers, while the old man was lifting his glass to drink, and put his foot over the five franc piece, which fell upon a place where the ground was always damp, where those who drank emptied the dregs from their glasses. Although it was slyly done, the old man might perhaps have discovered the abstraction, if his attention had not been attracted by Vermichel's entrance.

"Tonsard, do you know where to find the papa?" called that functionary from the foot of the steps.

Vermichel's question, the fall of the piece of money, and the emptying of the glass, came simultaneously.

"Present!" said Père Fourchon, holding out his hand to Vermichel to help him mount the steps to the wine-shop.

Vermichel was a typical Burgundian in appearance. His face was not red, but scarlet. It was covered with dried-up eruptions, which were defined by flat greenish places, called poetically by Fourchon "flowers of wine." This fiery face, whose features were terribly swollen by continual intoxication, was like that of a Cyclops, since it was illumined on the right side by a gleaming eyeball, and darkened on the other by a yellow patch over the left eye. Red hair which was always erect, and a beard like that of Judas, made Vermichel as formidable in appearance as he was gentle in reality.

His prominent nose looked like an interrogation point, to which the wide mouth seemed to be always replying, even when it was closed. He was short, and he wore hob-nailed shoes, pantaloons of bottle-green velvet, an old waistcoat which had been patched with different materials until it looked as if it had been made of a counterpane, a vest of coarse blue cloth, and a broad-brimmed gray hat. This luxury, required by the town of Soulanges, where Vermichel united the functions of door-keeper to the city hall, drummer, jailer, fiddler and practitioner, was cared for by Madame Vermichel, a terrible opponent of the Rabelaisian philosophy. This mustached virago, a yard wide, and weighing a hundred and twenty kilogrammes, notwithstanding which she was still agile, had established her domination over Vermichel, who was beaten by her when he was drunk, and who allowed her to continue the process when he was sober. For this reason Père Fourchon, when speaking of his comrade's finery, was wont to say: "It is the livery of a slave."

"Speak of the sun and you feel his rays," said Fourchon, inspired by Vermichel's glowing face, which did in truth resemble those golden suns painted on

the signs of inns in the provinces. "Has Madame Vermichel found too much dust on your back, that you are running away at this hour from your four-fifths—for the woman can't be called your *half*? What brings you here so early, in battle array?"

"Politics!" replied Vermichel, evidently accustomed to these jokes.

"Ah! is trade in Blangy in a bad way? are we going to protest some notes?" asked Père Fourchon, pouring out a glass of wine for his friend.

"Our monkey is right on my heels," replied Vermichel, motioning with his elbow.

In laborer's slang, monkey meant master. This phraseology made part of the dictionary of Vermichel and Fourchon.

"What is he prowling about here for?" asked Madame Tonsard.

"Oh! you folks," said Vermichel, "have brought him in, for the last three years, more than you are worth; ah! the master of Aigues has his eye on you. He is after you, the bourgeois! As father Brunet says: 'If there were three proprietors like him in the valley, my fortune would be made.'"

"What have they got against us poor folks now?" asked Marie.

"Oh! they have got you this time," replied Vermichel. "How can you help it? They have been after you for two years, with three keepers, besides a mounted one, all as active as ants, and a *garde champetre* who is a terror. Well, the mounted police are all up in arms against you now, and they are going to crush you."

"Pshaw!" said Tonsard; "we are too flat. The ground resists when the tree cannot."

"Don't you be too sure of it," said Père Fourchon to his son-in-law; "you have some landed property."

"Yes," continued Vermichel, "these people must love you, for they think of you from morning to night. They say to themselves, 'The cows belonging to these people eat our grass; we will take the cows, and then they can't steal the grass, for they can't eat it themselves.' And so they have given our monkey orders to seize your cows. We are to begin this morning at Conches, and take the cows belonging to Mother Bonnebault, Godain and Mitant."

As soon as she heard the name of Bonnebault, Marie, who was the sweetheart of Bonnebault, the grandson of the old woman who had the cow, made a sign to her father and mother, and sprang out into the vineyard. She slipped like an eel through a hole in the hedge, and darted toward Conches with the swiftness of a hunted hare.

"They will do so much," observed Tonsard tranquilly, "that they will get their bones broken, and that would be a pity, for their mothers could not give them any more."

"It might be as well," remarked Père Fourchon. "But see here, Vermichel, I cannot go with you for an hour; I have important business at the chateau."

"More important than serving three warrants at five sous each? 'You should not spit on the vintage,' as Father Noah says."

"I tell you, Vermichel, that business calls me to the chateau," said old Fourchon, assuming a comical air of importance.

"Besides," said Madame Tonsard, "it would be just as well for my father to be out of the way. Do you really want to find those cows?"

"Monsieur Brunet, who is a good fellow, asks nothing better than to find only their tracks," replied Vermichel. "A man who, like him, is obliged to be on the roads late at night should be prudent."

"He would do well to be," said Tonsard dryly.

"So he said like this to Monsieur Michaud," continued Vermichel: "'I will go as soon as court is over.' If he had really wanted to find the cows, he would have gone to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. But he will have to march just the same. Michaud can't be caught twice; he is a trained hunting dog. Ah! *what* a brigand!"

"Swaggerers like that ought to stay in the army," said Tonsard. "Good for

nothing but to let loose on the enemy. I wish he would ask me my name; it wouldn't be any use for him to call himself a veteran of the young guard, for I am sure that if we measured spurs I would have the best of it."

"Well," said Tonsard to Vermichel, "and when will the bills be out for the fête at Soulanges? Here it is the 8th of August."

"I carried them yesterday to Monsieur Bournier, the printer at Ville-aux-Fayes;" replied Vermichel. "At Madame Soudry's they were talking about fireworks on the lake."

"What a lot of people we shall have!" exclaimed Fourchon.

"So much profit for Socquard," said the inn-keeper, enviously.

"Oh! if it doesn't rain," added his wife, as if to keep up her own hopes.

Just then a horse was heard, coming from Soulanges, and five minutes later the officer of the law fastened his horse to a post placed for the purpose at the railing through which the cows passed; then he showed his head at the door of the Grand-I-vert.

"Come, come, boys, don't let's lose any time," he said, pretending to be in a great hurry.

"Ah!" said Vermichel, "you have a refractory assistant here, Monsieur Brunot. Père Fourchon wants to drop out."

"He has had several drops already," replied the officer; "but the law does not require that he shall be sober."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Brunet," said Fourchon, "but I am expected on business up at les Aigues; we are in treaty for an otter."

Brunet was a withered little man, with a bilious complexion, and was dressed in black cloth. His eye was sly, his hair curling, his mouth tight-shut, his nostrils pinched, his manner uneasy, and his speech hoarse. He presented the phenomenon of a face and manner in harmony with his profession. He understood law, or rather chicanery, so well that he was at once the terror and the adviser of the canton. He did not lack a certain popularity among the peasants, from whom he usually took his pay in some of their products. All these active and negative qualities gave him most of the clientage of the canton, to the exclusion of his brother practitioner Plissaud, of whom we shall have more to say later. This accident of one sheriff who does everything, and of another who does nothing, is very common in the country, among the justices of the peace.

"So matters are getting warm?" remarked Tonsard to Brunet.

"Well, what can you expect?" asked the sheriff. "You go too far with this man, and now he is defending himself. Your affairs will turn out badly; the Government will take the thing up."

"Then must we poor wretches die?" asked Madame Tonsard, offering a little glass on a saucer to the sheriff.

"The wretches may die, yet there will always be enough of them left," said Fourchon, sententiously.

"You are taking too much from the woods," continued the officer.

"Don't you believe it, Monsieur Brunet; they are making a great fuss over a few miserable fagots," said Madame Tonsard.

"The rich were not crushed low enough during the Revolution, that's what is the trouble," remarked Tonsard.

Just then a horrible and seemingly inexplicable noise was heard. The clatter of two hasty feet, mingled with the rattling of arms, sounded above the rustling of branches and foliage, borne along by steps that were yet more hasty. Two voices, as different as the two sets of footsteps, were shouting noisy exclamations. Every one guessed that some man was pursuing some woman; but why?

Their uncertainty did not last long.

"It is the mother," said Tonsard, standing up. "I know her shriek."

And suddenly, after climbing the rickety steps of the Grand-I-vert, by a final effort of whose energy none but a smuggler would be capable, old Mother Tonsard fell sprawling into the cabaret. The immense mass of fagots she carried made a terrible noise as it struck against the top of the doorway and on the floor.

Everybody sprang out of the way. The tables, bottles and chairs which were hit by the branches were overturned and scattered. The clatter would not have been as great if the cottage itself had fallen down.

"I am dead; the wretch has killed me!"

The exclamation, the actions, and the flight of the old woman were explained by the appearance upon the threshold of a keeper dressed in green cloth, with a hat edged with silver cord, a sabre at his side, his leather shoulder-belt bearing the arms of Montcornet over those of the Troisvilles, his waistcoat of the regulation red, and his leathern gaiters coming nearly up to his knees.

After a moment of hesitation, the guard, seeing Brunet and Vermichel, said:

"I call you to witness."

"To what?" said Tonsard.

"This woman has in her bundle of fagots a ten-year-old oak cut up into firewood. It's a regular crime!"

Vermichel, as soon as he heard the word witness, judged it advisable to go at once and take the air in the vineyard.

"What! what!" said Tonsard, placing himself before the keeper while his wife raised her mother-in-law; "are you going to show your claws, Vatel? Seize your prisoners on the high-road, if you will; you are at home there, brigand; but get out of here. My house is my own, I'd have you know. I am master here."

"She was caught in the act, and she must come with me."

"Arrest my mother in my house? You have no right to do that. My house is inviolable, as you know very well. Have you a warrant from Monsieur Guerbet, our magistrate? Ah! you can't come in here without the law to back you. You are not the law, although you have sworn to starve us out, you miserable forest-ranger, you!"

The keeper's anger had reached such a pitch that he attempted to seize the fagots; but the old woman, who resembled a frightful piece of living black parchment, and whose like was never seen except in David's picture of the "Sabines," cried out:

"Don't touch it, or I will scratch your eyes out."

"Well, I dare you to untie the bundle of fagots in the presence of Monsieur Brunet," said the keeper.

Although the sheriff affected an indifference which familiarity with such affairs gives to officers, he winked gravely at the innkeeper and his wife, as much as to say: "A bad business!" But old Fourchon looked at his daughter, and pointed to the ashes that were lying in the fire-place. Madame Tonsard at once understood both her father's suggestion and her mother-in-law's danger, and she snatched up a handful of the ashes and threw them full in the keeper's eyes. Vatel began to howl lustily. Tonsard, who could see, if the keeper could not, pushed him roughly down the outside steps, which were in such good condition to trip up the feet of a blinded man that Vatel rolled fairly down to the road, dropping his gun as he went.

In a twinkling the fagot was unbound, and the live wood snatched out and concealed with a dexterity impossible to describe. Brunet, not wishing to be a witness of this performance, which he had foreseen, hastened to the relief of the guard; he seated him upon the side of the ditch and dipped his handkerchief into the water, to bathe the eyes of the patient, who, in spite of his suffering, had managed to drag himself toward the brook.

"Vatel, you are wrong," said the sheriff; "you have no right to enter people's houses, you know."

The little old woman, who was almost humpbacked, stood on the threshold of her door, with her hands on her hips, darting lightning flashes from her eyes, and curses from her toothless, foaming mouth, which could be heard nearly to Blangy.

"Ah! you rascal, that was well done. May the furies take you! To suspect me of cutting down trees! me, the most honest woman in the village; and to chase me like a wild beast! I wish you might lose your cursed eyes! the country would

be the better off. You are all mischief-makers, you and your companions, who imagine crimes in order to stir up quarrels between your master and us!"

The guard allowed the sheriff to bathe his eyes while the latter kept telling him that in point of law he was to blame.

"The old beggar! she has tired us out," said Vatel at length. "She has been in the woods all night."

Everybody had taken hold to help conceal the stolen wood, and things were promptly put to rights in the cabaret. Then Tonsard went to the door and called out insolently:

"Vatel, my boy, if you try to violate my domicile again, I will answer you with my gun. You have had nothing but ashes to-day, but next time you will have the fire. You do not know your business. But you seem to be warm. If you would like to have a glass of wine, you can; you may see that my mother's fagot has not an atom of live wood in it; it is all brushwood."

"Scoundrel!" said the keeper in a low voice to the sheriff, more enraged by this irony than he had been by the cinders in his eyes.

Just then Charles, the footman, who had that morning been sent in search of Blondet, appeared at the door of the Grand-I-vert.

"What's the matter, Vatel?" he asked.

"Oh!" replied the keeper, wiping his eyes, which he had plunged wide open into the brook, to finish cleansing them, "I owe these people something, and I will make them curse the day when they first saw the light."

"If that is what you intend, Monsieur Vatel," said Tonsard, coldly, "you will find that we are not wanting in courage in Burgundy."

Vatel disappeared.

Rather curious to know the key to this riddle, Charles looked into the wine-shop.

"Bring your otter up to the chateau, if you really have one," he said to Père Fourchon.

The old man rose hastily and followed Charles.

"Well, where is your otter?" asked Charles, smiling suspiciously.

"This way," said the old man, going toward the Thune.

This was the name given to the brook formed from the overflow of the waters of the mill-dam and the park of les Aigues. The Thune runs along the highway as far as the little lake of Soulanges, which it crosses, and where it rejoins the Avonne, after feeding the mills and the streams of the chateau of Soulanges.

"Here it is; I hid it here in the channel, with a stone at its neck."

As he stooped down and rose up again, the old man missed the feeling of the five franc piece in his pocket, where he so seldom had money that he was likely to notice its presence or its absence.

"Oh! the sharks!" he cried; "I hunt otters, but they hunt their father. They take away everything that I get, and pretend that it is for my good. For my good, indeed! If it were not for my poor Mouche, who is the consolation of my old age, I would drown myself. Children are the ruin of their parents. You are not married, are you, Monsieur Charles? Never get married! then you will not have to reproach yourself with spreading bad blood. I thought I could buy tow with my money, and now it is gone! The gentleman, who is a fine fellow, gave me ten francs; well, the price of my otter will have to go up now."

Charles was so suspicious of Père Fourchon that he took his laments, which were this time sincere, for a sort of rehearsal of what he intended to say later, and he made the mistake of expressing his opinion in a smile which was detected by the malicious old man.

"Come, Père Fourchon, you must be on your best behavior now; you know you are going to see madame," said Charles, noticing the ruby flame on the old man's nose and cheeks.

"I know what I am about, Charles; and to prove it, if you care to take me into the kitchen and give me some of the

leavings of breakfast and a bottle or two of Spanish wine, I will give you a pointer that will save you from a foul."

"Tell it, and Francois shall have monsieur's order to get you a glass of wine," replied the footman.

"Is it a bargain?"

"It is."

"Well, then, you are in the habit of going to talk with my granddaughter Catherine beneath the arch of the bridge of Avonne; Godain loves her; he has seen you, and he is jealous. Now, if you dance with her on the day of the fête of Soulanges at Tivoli, you will dance more than you like. Godain is a miser, and he is a bad man; he is capable of breaking your arm before you could stop him."

"That is too dear; Catherine is a fine girl, but she is not worth all that," said Charles. "But why should Godain be so jealous?"

"He wants to marry her."

"Then he will beat her," said Charles.

"That depends," said the old man. "She takes after her mother, upon whom Tonsard has never laid his hand, for he is too much afraid of what she might do in return. A woman who knows how to hold her own is very useful. Besides, if it came to blows with Catherine, Godain would not give the last one, although he is so strong."

"Here, Père Fourchon, here are forty sous to drink my health, in case I can't get you the sherry."

Père Fourchon turned his head while he pocketed the money, so that Charles should not see the expression of pleasure and irony which he could not repress.

"Catherine," continued the old man, "is a proud minx, and she likes sherry; you had better tell her to come and get some at Aigues."

Charles looked at Père Fourchon with naïve admiration, not suspecting the immense interest which the general's enemies had in getting one spy the more within the chateau.

"I suppose the general feels happy," continued the old man, "now that the peasants are all so quiet. What does he say about it? does he still like Sibilet?"

"Monsieur Michaud is the only one who finds fault with Monsieur Sibilet; they say that he will get him dismissed."

"That's the jealousy of the trade," replied Fourchon. "I'll bet you would like to get François dismissed, and step into his place of head valet."

"Confound it, he has twelve hundred francs," said Charles; "but they can't send him away; he knows all the general's secrets:"

"As Madame Michaud knows those of the countess," replied Fourchon, watching Charles carefully. "See here, my boy, do you know whether monsieur and madame have separate rooms?"

"Yes, they do," replied Charles.

But just then they came beneath the windows, and could say no more.

V.

THE ENEMIES FACE TO FACE.

At the beginning of breakfast Francois, the head valet, came to Blondet, and whispered softly, but loud enough for the count to hear him:

"Monsieur, Père Fourchon's boy claims that they caught an otter after all, and wants to know whether you want it, or whether he shall take it to the sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes."

Although Emile Blondet was an adept at mystification, he could not help blushing like a girl.

"Oh, ho! so you hunted the otter this morning with Père Fourchon," cried the general, shouting with laughter.

"What is it?" asked the countess, made uneasy by her husband's laughter.

"If a man of wit like him," continued the general, "can be taken in by Père Fourchon, an old cuirassier need not blush to have hunted that otter, which is very much like the third horse that the postilion always makes you pay for, but never lets you have."

In the midst of fresh explosions of laughter, the general managed to add:

"I know now why you changed your

boots and pantaloons; you got into the water. I did not carry it quite so far as you, for I stayed on the bank; and yet you are much cleverer than I."

"You forget, my dear," observed Madame de Montcornet, "that I have not the least idea of what you are talking."

At these words, which betrayed the pique that the countess felt on account of Blondin's confusion, the general regained his seriousness, and Blondin related his adventure.

"But," said the countess, "if these poor people really have an otter, they are not so much to blame."

"Yes; but the otter has not been seen for the last ten years," retorted the general.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Francois, "the boy swears upon his honor that he has one now."

"If they have one, I will pay them for it," said the general.

"God has not left the Avonne without any otters at all," observed the Abbe Brossette.

"Ah! monsieur, if you bring the Almighty against me—" exclaimed Blondet.

"Who is here?" asked the countess, quickly.

"Mouche, madame; the little boy who always goes with Père Fourchon," replied the footman.

"Let him come in—if madame will permit," said the general. "Perhaps he will amuse us."

"At least we can find out the truth of it," added the countess.

Mouche appeared a few minutes later, in his partial nudity. The sight of this personification of poverty in the midst of the elegant dining-room, where the price of one of the mirrors alone would have been a fortune to the boy, with his bare legs, breast and head, made it almost impossible not to yield to the inspirations of charity. Mouche's eyes, like two burning coals, examined eagerly the wealth of the room and the viands.

"Then you have no mother?" asked the countess, who could explain the child's neglected condition in no other way.

"No, madame; m'ma died of grief when p'pa did not come back from the wars, in 1812, where he got frozen—saving your presence. But I have my grandpa, Fourchon, who is a very good man, although he beats me sometimes like fury."

"How does it happen, my dear, that there are people on your land who are so wretched?" asked the countess, looking at the general.

"Madame la Comtesse," said the curé, "the people in this commune are poor only because they choose to be so; Monsieur le Comte means well; but we have to deal with people who have no religion, and whose sole thought is to exist at your expense."

"But, my dear sir," said Blondet, "are you not here to attend to their morals?"

"I have been sent here by the bishop," replied the curé, "as a sort of missionary; but, as I had the honor of telling him, the savages of France are unapproachable; it is a point of honor among them not to listen to us, while it is possible to gain the ear and the interest of the American savage."

"Monsieur le Curé, they do help me a little bit now; but if I went to your church they would not help me at all, and the folks would make fun of my clothes."

"Religion should begin with giving him some pantaloons, my dear abbé," said Blondet. "In your missions, do you not begin by winning the confidence of the savages?"

"He would sell them at once," replied the abbe in a low voice, "and I have no authority for beginning such proceedings."

"Monsieur le Curé is right," said the general, looking at Mouche.

The policy of the ragamuffin consists in appearing to understand nothing of what is being said, when its tenor is against him.

"The intelligence of the little rascal proves that he knows good from evil," continued the count. "He is of an age to work, but his only aim is to break the law without being found out. He is well known to the keepers. Before I became

mayor, he knew perfectly well that a landed proprietor, although he may be a witness of some trespass on his property, yet has no right to arrest the trespasser; he therefore boldly remained in my meadows with his cows, without going away even when he saw me; while now he runs off at once."

"Ah! that is very wrong," said the countess; "you must not take what does not belong to you, my little boy."

"Madame, a body must eat; my grandpa gives me more blows than loaves, and those don't fill the stomach, slaps don't! When the cows have milk I draw a little, and that helps me along. Is the gentleman so poor that he cannot let me drink a little of his grass?"

"Perhaps he has not had anything to eat to-day," said the countess, moved by the sight of such misery. "Give him some bread and the rest of that chicken; give him some breakfast," she added, looking at the footman. "Where do you sleep, little boy?"

"Anywhere that they will let me, in winter, madame; when it is warm enough I sleep out of doors."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"There is still time to teach him better," said the countess to her husband.

"He will make a soldier," returned the general, gruffly; "this is good training for him. I went through as many hardships as he, and look at me now!"

"Excuse me, general, I can't be drafted," said the boy. "I don't belong to any one. I was born in the fields, and my name isn't any more Mouche than anything else. Grandpa has told me how lucky I am. They can't take me."

"Do you love your grandpa?" asked the countess, trying to read the twelve-year-old heart.

"He boxes my ears when he feels like it, but he is great fun; he is such a good fellow! And he says he pays himself that way for teaching me to read and write."

"Can you read?" asked the count.

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur le Comte, and write too, grandly, as true as we have a real otter."

"What is that?" asked the count, handing him a newspaper.

"The Qu-o-ti-dienne," replied Mouche, hesitating only three times.

Everybody laughed, even the Abbe Brossette.

"Well, you made me read a newspaper," cried Mouche, exasperated. "My grandpa says that they are made for the rich, and that every one is sure to know some time what is in them."

"The boy is right, general," said Blondet. "He makes me long to meet again my conqueror of this morning."

Mouche understood perfectly well that he was posing for the amusement of the company; Pére Fourchon's pupil was worthy of his teacher; he began to cry.

"How can you tease a child who has bare feet?" asked the countess.

"And who thinks it perfectly natural that his grandfather should reimburse himself for his education, by boxing his ears," added Blondet.

"My little boy, have you really an otter?" asked the countess.

"Yes, madame, just as true as you are the most beautiful lady I have ever seen or ever expect to," said the boy, wiping his eyes.

"Show it to us," said the general.

"Oh! monsieur, my grandpa has hidden it; but how it did kick when we got it to the rope-walk! You can send for my grandpa, for he wants to sell it himself."

"Take him to the kitchen," said the countess to Francois; "let him have some breakfast. You may send Charles for Père Fourchon. See if you cannot find some shoes, pantaloons and a vest for this child. Those who come here naked should go away clothed."

"May God bless you, dear lady," said Mouche, as he went away. "Monsieur le Curé may feel quite sure that I will keep the things and wear them on fête days, since you gave them to me."

Emile, Madame de Montcornet and the curé exchanged glances which seemed to say: "He is not such a fool, after all."

"Certainly, madame," said the curé, when the child had left them, "we cannot keep a strict reckoning with the poor. I believe that they have hidden excuses which can be judged by God alone; excuses both physical and moral, that are born in them, and that are produced by an order of things which we accuse, but which is sometimes the result of qualities that, unfortunately for society, have no vent. The miracles accomplished upon the battlefield have taught us that the poor scoundrels can upon occasion transform themselves into heroes. But here, your circumstances are exceptional, and if your charity is not judiciously administered, you run the risk of supporting your enemies."

"Our enemies!" exclaimed the countess.

"Cruel enemies," added the general, gravely.

"Père Fourchon, with his son-in-law Tonsard," observed the curé, "represents the intelligence of the lower class of people in the valley; they are consulted about everything. These people are incredibly malicious. Ten peasants, assembled in a wine-shop, are, so to speak, the small change of a great policy."

Just then François announced Monsieur Sibilet.

"He is my minister of finance," said the general, smiling; "let him come in.—He will explain to you the gravity of the situation," he added, turning to his wife and Blondet.

"And he will not keep any of it from you," added the curé in a low tone.

Blondet then saw the person of whom he had heard ever since his arrival, and whom he had greatly desired to meet, the land-steward of les Aigues. He saw a man of medium height, about thirty years old, with a sulky look and a discontented face, which did not seem made for smiles. Beneath an anxious brow, eyes of a changeable green seemed to be trying to evade each other, and thus to disguise their owner's thoughts. He was dressed in brown pantaloons and a black coat and vest; he wore his hair long and straight, which gave him a clerical appearance. The pantaloons could not disguise the fact that he was bow-legged. Although his pallid complexion and his soft flesh gave the impression that he was sickly, he was in reality robust. The sound of his voice, which was a little harsh, corresponded with the rest of his unflattering exterior.

Blondet exchanged a secret glance with the abbe, and the look which he received in return for his own told the journalist that his suspicions with regard to the steward were shared by the young priest.

"Sibilet," said the general, "did you not estimate that the amount stolen from us by the peasants amounted to a quarter of the revenues?"

"To much more," replied the steward. "Your poor take from you more than the State exacts of you in taxes. Even a little rascal like Mouche gleans his two bushels a day; and the old women, who would seem to you only fit to die, recover in harvest time the agility and the strength of youth. You will be able to witness this phenomenon," he added, turning to Blondet, "for the harvest, which has been put back by the July rains, will begin in six days. The rye will be cut next week. The people are not allowed to glean unless they have a certificate of pauperism given by the mayor of the commune; and no commune should allow any one to glean on its territory except its own paupers; but the communes of a canton glean from each other indiscriminately, without any certificate. While we have sixty poor people in the commune, there are at least forty do-nothings who join their ranks. And even people who have a business leave it to go and glean in the fields. Here, all these people collect three hundred bushels a day; the harvest lasts fifteen days, and there are four thousand five hundred bushels carried off into the canton. Thus the gleanings amount to more than the tithes. As for the abuse of the pasturage, it takes off about a sixth of the produce of our meadows. As for the wood, that is incalculable; they have got so they cut six-year-old trees. The depredations beneath which you are suffer-

ing, Monsieur le Comte, amount to over twenty thousand francs a year."

"There, madame," said the general to the countess, "do you hear that?"

"Is it not exaggerated?" she asked.

"Unfortunately, no," replied the curé. "Poor Niseron, the old fellow with the white head, who unites the functions of bell-ringer, beadle, grave-digger, sexton and clerk, in spite of his republican opinions—the grandfather of that little Genevieve whom you have placed with Madame Michaud."

"La Péchina," said Sibilet, interrupting the abbe.

"What do you mean by Péchina?" asked the countess.

"Madame, when you met Genevieve by the roadside, in such a wretched condition, you cried out in Italian: 'Piccina!' this word became a nickname for her, and was corrupted to such an extent that to-day the whole commune calls your protégée Péchina. The poor child is the only one who comes to church, with Madame Michaud and Madame Sibilet."

"And she is not much better off for it," said the steward, "for they abuse her and ill-treat her on account of her religion."

"Well," continued the curé, "this poor old man, seventy-two years old, picks up, honestly and otherwise, about a bushel and a half a day; but the rectitude of his opinions prevents him from selling his gleanings, as all the others do; he keeps them for his own consumption. At my request Monsieur Langlumé, your deputy, grinds his grain for nothing, and my servant bakes his bread with my own."

"I had forgotten my little protégée," said the countess, who had been startled by Sibilet's words. "Your arrival here," she added, turning to Blondet, "has turned my head. But after breakfast we will go together to the Avonne gate, and I will show you a living figure like those the painters of the fifteenth century delighted to copy."

Just then Père Fourchon, who had been brought by Francois, went clattering along in his broken sabots, which he deposited at the kitchen door. The countess made a sign of assent with her head when Francois announced the old man, and Père Fourchon, followed by Mouche, who had his mouth full, appeared in the doorway, holding his otter in his hand, hanging by a cord tied around its yellow paws, which were in the form of a star, like those of all web-footed animals. He glanced at the four at the table, and at Sibilet, with the look of mingled defiance and servility which serves the peasants as a veil, and then he brandished the otter triumphantly in the air.

"Here it is!" he said, addressing Blondet.

"That is my otter," said the Parisian; "I paid you well for it."

"Oh! my dear sir," replied Père Fourchon, "yours got away. It is snug in its hole by this time. This one is a very different one. Mouche saw it coming from a long way off, after you had gone away. As true as Monsieur the Comte covered himself and his cuirassiers with glory at Waterloo, the otter is mine, as much as les Aigues belongs to him. But you can have him for twenty francs, or I will carry it to our sub-prefect. If Monsieur Gourdon thinks it is too dear, as we hunted together this morning, I will give you the preference, for that is only right."

"Twenty francs?" said Blondet. "You don't call that good French for 'preference,' do you?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, "I know so little French that, if you like, I will ask for the sum in Burgundian; and if I only get it, I don't care what language it comes in. I will speak Latin if you like: latinus, latina, latinum. After all, it is no more than you promised me this morning. Besides, my children have already taken your money away from me; I was bemoaning it on the way here. Ask Charles if I wasn't. I don't want to have them arrested for ten francs, and publish their wickedness before the court. As soon as I have a few sous they give me something to drink, and take my money away. It is very hard, to be driven to taking a glass of wine somewhere else than in my own daughter's house. But that is the way

with all the children nowadays. That is what we have gained by the Revolution. Everything is for the children, and nothing for the fathers. Ah! I am bringing Mouche up in a very different way; he loves me, the little rascal," he added, giving a little tap to the boy's cheek.

"You seem to be making a thief of him, like all the others," said Sibilet; "he never goes to bed without some piece of wrong-doing on his conscience."

"Ah! Monsieur Sibilet, his conscience is easier than your own. Poor boy! what does he take? A little grass; that is better than killing a man. He knows nothing of mathematics, like you; he can't subtract and add and multiply. You do us a great deal of harm. You say that we are a lot of thieves, and you are the cause of the rupture between our lord, there, who is a worthy man, and ourselves, who are worthy people. And there is not a better country than this one. See here! do we have any incomes? do we not go nearly naked? We go to sleep in beautiful sheets, which are washed every morning by the dew, and unless you grudge us the air we breathe and the rays of sun that warm us, I do not see what we have that you can want to take from us. The bourgeois steals at his fireside; it is more profitable than picking up a few sticks in the corner of the woods. There are no keepers, mounted or on foot, for Monsieur Gaubertin, who came here without a sou to his name, and now he has two millions. It is all very well to say robbers! For fifteen years Père Guerbel, the tax-gatherer of Soulanges, has been going away from our villages at night with his money, and no one has ever taken so much as a sou from him. A country of thieves would not have done like that. We don't get rich by thieving. Show me now which of us, we, or you bourgeois, can sit down and live without working."

"If you had worked, you would have some money now," said the curé. "God blesses labor."

"I do not like to give you the lie, monsieur, for you know a great deal more than I do, and so perhaps you can explain this thing to me. Here I am, the idler, the do-nothing, the drunkard, the good-for-nothing Père Fourchon, who has had some education, who has been a farmer, but who fell into the depths of misfortune and never got out again. Well, now, what difference is there between me and the worthy and honest Father Niseron—a vine-dresser, seventy years old, for he is just my age—who for sixty years was a ditch-digger, who got up before daylight every morning to go to his work, who has an iron body and a beautiful soul? He is just as poor as I am. La Péchina, his granddaughter, is at service with Ma'am Michaud, while little Mouche is as free as air. Is the poor man rewarded for his virtues in the same way that I am punished for my vices? He does not know what wine is; he is as sober as an apostle; he buries the dead, while I make the living dance; he is always in trouble, while I am as happy as you please. We have kept right along together; we have the same snow on our heads, and the same emptiness in our pockets, and I furnish him the rope with which he rings the bell. He is a republican, while I am not even a publican. That's all the difference. Whether the peasant is good or bad, according to you, he goes as he came, in rags, while you wear fine linen."

No one interrupted Père Fourchon, who seemed to owe his eloquence to the bottled wine; Sibilet wanted to stop him at first, but a gesture from Blondet restrained him. The curé, the general and the countess understood from the journalist's glances that he wished to study pauperism from the life, and perhaps take his revenge upon Père Fourchon.

"And what kind of an education are you giving Mouche?" asked Blondet. "What are you doing to make him better than your daughters?"

"Do you ever speak to him of God?" asked the curé.

"Oh! no, no, sir; I do not tell him to fear God, but men. God is good, and you say He has promised to give us the kingdom of heaven, since the kingdoms of this world are kept by the rich. I say to him: 'Mouche, fear the prison; that is

the road that leads to the scaffold. Do not steal, but get things given to you. Theft leads to murder, and that calls down the justice of men. The sword of justice is what you must fear; that is what makes the rich sleep easy and disturbs the slumbers of the poor. Learn to read. When you have learning, you will know how to get rich under cover of the law, like this fine Monsieur Gaubertin; you will be a steward, perhaps, like Monsieur Sibilet, who has his rations given him by the count. The thing is to keep close to the rich, for there are plenty of crumbs under their table.' That's what I call a good, solid education. So the little fellow always keeps on the right side of the law. He will be a good subject, and take care of me."

"And what are you going to make of him?" asked Blondet.

"A servant, first," replied Fourchon; "because, when he sees the masters close to, he can learn a good deal from them. A good example will teach him how to make his fortune lawfully, like you all. If the count would put him in his stables, to learn to rub down the horses, the boy would be very glad; for, if he fears men, he does not fear beasts."

"You have a good deal of intelligence, Père Fourchon," said Blondet; "you know what you are talking about, and what you say has some sense in it."

"Oh! sense? no. I left my sense at the Grand-I-vert, with my two five-franc pieces."

"How could a man like you allow himself to fall so low? for, as things are, a peasant has only himself to thank for his poverty; he is free, and he can become rich. Times are not as they were once. If a peasant knows how to lay by a little money, he can find a piece of ground for sale, and buy it, and then he is his own master."

"I have seen the old times, and I have seen the new," replied Fourchon; "the label is changed, it is true, but the wine is the same. To-day is only the younger brother of yesterday. Come! put that in your journals. Are we free? We belong to the same village still, and the same lord is there; his name is labor. The hoe, our only fortune, has never left our hand. Whether it is a nobleman or taxes that takes the most of what we have, we must spend our life in toil."

"But you could try your fortune at something else," said Blondet.

"You talk of seeking my fortune. But where should I go? To get out of my own department I should have to have a passport which would cost me forty sous. For the last forty years I have never had a forty-sou piece in my pocket, with anything else to chink against it. To go anywhere takes as many crowns as there are villages, and there are not many Fourchons who have enough money to visit six villages. There is nothing but the drafting to take us away from our villages. And what are we good for in the army? To let the colonel live by means of the soldier, just as the bourgeois lives by means of the peasant. Out of a hundred colonels, is there one that came from our ranks? There, as everywhere else, a hundred fall for one that rises. And whose fault is it that they fall? God and the usurers know! The best thing for us to do is to stay in our communes, where we are penned in like sheep by the force of circumstances, as we were formerly by the noblemen. And I mock at that which keeps me here. Whether a man is held fast by the law of necessity, or by that of the manor, he is in either case compelled to dig the ground. Wherever we are, we dig the soil, and we spade it and manure it and work it for you, who are born rich, as we are born poor. The masses will always be the same; they will always remain what they are. Those among us who rise are not as numerous as those among you who fall. We know that, if we are not scholars. You need not come after us to arrest us all the time. We leave you alone—let us live. Otherwise, if this keeps on, you will have to support us in your prisons by-and-by, where we would be more comfortable than on our pallets. You want to be our masters, and we are enemies, to-day, as much as we were thirty years ago. You have all,

and we have nothing; you cannot expect our friendship."

"This sounds like a declaration of war," said the general.

"My lord," replied Fourchon, "when les Aigues belonged to the poor madame (may God rest her soul!) we were happy. She let us pick up our living in her fields, and our wood in her forests; she was none the poorer for it. And you, who are at least as rich as she, you hunt us out, as if we were wild beasts, and you drag us before the courts. Well, it will end badly. You will cause harm. I just saw your keeper, Vatel, almost kill a poor old woman for a bit of wood. You will become the enemy of the people, and they will do to you as they did in the old days; they will curse you as heartily as they blessed the old madame. The curse of the poor, my lord, grows; and it becomes greater than the greatest of your oaks, and the oak furnishes the scaffold. No one here tells you the truth; there it is! I expect death any day, and I do not risk much in giving the truth to you, over and above our bargain. I make the peasants dance at the great fetes, when I go with Vermichel to the Café de la Paix, at Soulanges, and I hear what they say; well, they are badly disposed toward you, and they will make it difficult for you to stay here. If your damned Michaud does not change, they'll make you change him. Come!—that opinion, together with the otter, is well worth twenty francs."

While the old man was speaking the last sentence, there was a sound of steps without, and the man whom Fourchon had just menaced entered without being announced. At the look which Michaud bestowed upon the poor man's orator, it was evident that the threat had reached his ear, and all Fourchon's audacity collapsed. The look produced upon the otter fisherman had the effect that the policeman produces upon the thief; Fourchon knew himself to be in the wrong, and Michaud seemed to have the right to call him to account for a discourse which was evidently intended to alarm the inhabitants of the chateau.

"Here is my minister of war," said the general, addressing Blondet and motioning to Michaud.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said the latter, "for entering without stopping to be announced, but the urgency of affairs demands that I speak with the general."

Michaud, while he was excusing himself, was looking at Sibilet, to whom Fourchon's bold remarks caused an exquisite delight, which was not, however, noticed by any of those seated at the table, for they were giving their undivided attention to Fourchon; Michaud, however, who, for reasons of his own, was always watching Sibilet, was struck by his expression and manner.

"As he says, he has well earned his twenty francs, monsieur," exclaimed Sibilet; "the otter is not dear."

"Give him twenty francs," said the count to the footman.

"Then you take it from me?" asked Blondet of the general.

"I want to have it stuffed," replied the count.

"Ah! this good sir left me the skin," said Père Fourchon.

"Well," exclaimed the countess, "you can have a hundred sous for the skin; but go now."

The strong, uncultivated odor of the two habitués of the highway so poisoned the air of the dining-room for Madame de Montcornet, whose delicate senses were offended by it, that she would have been obliged to leave the room herself if Fourchon and Mouche had stayed much longer. It was to this inconvenience that the old man owed his twenty-five francs. As he went out, he looked at Michaud timidly, and made him countless salutations.

"What I just said to my lord, Michaud, was for your good," he said.

"Or for that of the people who pay you," returned Michaud, eying him sharply.

"When you have served the coffee, leave us," said the general to the servants, "and be sure that you shut the doors."

Blondet, who had not hitherto seen the head keeper of les Aigues, received, in

looking at him, very different impressions from those that Sibilet had given him. Michaud commanded as much esteem and confidence as Sibilet had inspired repulsion.

The head keeper attracted attention in the first place by a fine face, of a perfect oval, and regular drawing, including the nose, which is usually wanting in regularity in most French faces. The features, while correctly drawn, did not want expression, perhaps because of a complexion composed of those tones of ochre and red which indicate physical courage. The eyes, of a clear brown, quick and piercing, did not conceal their owner's thoughts, but looked frankly out. The forehead, large and pure, was set off by masses of black hair. Honesty, decision, and a confidence in good, animated this beautiful face, where a soldier's life had left some furrows on the brow. Suspicion and mistrust could be read there, as soon as formed in his mind. Like all men drawn for the élite of the cavalry, his figure, still beautiful and slender, showed that the keeper was a powerful man.

Michaud, who wore mustaches, whiskers and a beard, reminded one of the type of that martial figure which the deluge of patriotic paintings and engravings has made almost ridiculous. This type had the fault of being common in the French army; but it is possible that the continuity of the same emotions, the sufferings of the bivouac from which neither high nor low were exempt, and the efforts common both to chiefs and soldiers on the field of battle, contributed to make this physiognomy a uniform one.

Michaud was dressed throughout in blue cloth, and still kept to the black satin collar and military boots, as he did to the rather stiff attitude. His shoulders were drawn back and his chest expanded, as though he were still under arms. The red ribbon of the Legion of Honor fluttered at his button-hole. Finally, to finish, with a single word of moral description, this purely physical picture, we may add that while the steward had never failed to address his master as M. le Comte, Michaud had never named him otherwise than as "general."

Blondet exchanged another look with the abbe, which seemed to say: "What a contrast!" motioning to the steward and the head keeper; then in order to learn whether his character, thought and speech harmonized with the stature, face and expression, he looked at Michaud, and said:

"I went out early this morning, and found your keepers still asleep."

"At what hour?" asked the head keeper, anxiously.

"At half-past seven."

Michaud looked almost mischievously at his general.

"And by which gate did monsieur go out?" asked Michaud.

"The Conches gate," replied Blondet. "The keeper looked at me from the window, and he was still in his night shirt."

"Gaillard had probably just gone to bed," replied Michaud. "When you said that you went out early, I thought you meant by daylight, and I knew that if the keeper was in bed at that time, he must be sick; but at half-past seven, he had just gone to bed. We watch all night," continued Michaud, in answer to an astonished look from the countess, "but our vigilance is always at fault. You have just given twenty-five francs to a man who a little while ago coolly helped to conceal the traces of a theft which was committed on your property this morning. We must speak of this when you have finished, general, for something must be done."

"You are always standing up for your rights, Michaud," said Sibilet, "and *summum jus, summa injuria.* If you do not show some tolerance, you will get yourself into trouble. I wish you had heard Père Fourchon just now, when the wine made him speak a little more frankly than usual."

"He frightened me," said the countess.

"He did not say anything which I have not known for a long time," observed the general.

"Oh! the scoundrel was not drunk; he was playing his part for the benefit of

some one. Perhaps you know whom?" added Michaud, making Sibilet blush by the sudden look which he turned upon him.

"*O rus!*" exclaimed Blondet, with another glance at the abbé.

"These poor people suffer," said the countess, "and there was some truth in what Fourchon shouted to us—for he cannot be said to have spoken it."

"Madame," replied Michaud, "do you think that the emperor's soldiers were on rose-leaves for fourteen years? The general is a count, and a great officer of the Legion of Honor; but am I jealous of him, I who fought with him? Do I want to cheat him of his glory, to refuse him the honors due to his grade? The peasant must obey, as soldiers obey; he should have the honesty of the soldier, and his respect for acquired rights, and should try to become an officer loyally, by his own toil and not through theft. The plow-share and the saber are twins. The soldier has a harder time than the peasant, for death is constantly hovering over his head."

"I should like to tell them that from the pulpit," exclaimed the abbé.

"Tolerance?" continued the keeper, still replying to Sibilet. "I would tolerate a loss of ten per cent of the gross revenues of les Aigues; but as things are going now, you are losing thirty per cent, general; and if Monsieur Sibilet has so many per cent on his receipts, I cannot understand his tolerance, for he is benevolently giving up a thousand or twelve hundred francs every year."

"My dear Michaud," returned Sibilet, sourly, "as I have told Monsieur le Comte, I would rather lose twelve hundred francs than my life. Think of it seriously; I have given you warnings enough."

"Life!" cried the countess. "Is any one's life in danger?"

"We must not discuss the affairs of the state here," said the general, laughing. "All this, madame, signifies that Sibilet, in his character of financier, is timid and cowardly, while my minister of war is brave, and, like his general, fears nothing."

"Say rather, prudent, Monsieur le Comte," exclaimed Sibilet.

"Are we here, like Cooper's heroes in the forests of America, surrounded by snares laid by savages?" asked Blondet, mockingly.

"Your business, gentlemen," said Madame de Montcornet, "is to carry on the administration without alarming us by the grinding of the wheels."

"Perhaps it is just as well, countess, that you should know the cost of one of those pretty bonnets that you wear," said the curé.

"No, for I might then go without them, become respectful before a twenty-franc piece, and grow miserly, like all the country people, and I should be losing too much," replied the countess, laughing. "Give me your arm, my dear abbé; let us leave the general between his two ministers, and go to the Avonne gate to see Madame Michaud, whom I have not visited since my arrival; it is time that I looked after my little protégée."

And the pretty woman, forgetting already the rags of Fourchon and Mouche, their looks of hatred and Sibilet's terrors, went to put on her shoes and her hat.

The Abbe Brossette and Blondet obeyed the countess's call, and waited for her on the terrace in front of the house.

"What do you think of all this?" asked Blondet.

"I am a pariah; they spy upon me, as their common enemy; I am forced to keep the eyes and the ears of prudence constantly open, in order to escape the nets which they spread to embarrass me," the abbe replied. "Between ourselves, I sometimes wonder if they will not shoot me."

"And yet you stay here?" said Blondet.

"One does not desert the cause of God, any more than that of the emperor," replied the abbe, with striking simplicity.

The journalist took the priest's hand and pressed it cordially.

"You therefore understand," added the abbe, "why it is impossible for me to know anything of what is being plotted. Nevertheless it seems to me that the gen-

eral is fighting what in Artois and Belgium they call *ill-will*."

A few words will not be out of place here concerning the curé of Blangy.

He was the fourth son of a good bourgeois family of Autun, and was a man of intelligence. He was small and thin, but his insignificant appearance was redeemed by that air of obstinacy which belongs to the people of Burgundy. He had accepted this secondary position out of pure devotion, for to his religious convictions he joined political opinions that were equally strong. He had in him the stuff of which the priests of the olden time were made; he held to the Church and the clergy passionately; he viewed things as a whole, and his ambition was not spoiled by egotism; *to serve* was his motto, to serve the Church and the monarchy at the point most threatened; to serve in the last ranks, like a soldier who feels himself destined sooner or later to become a general, by his desire to do well, and by his courage. He did not trifle with his vows of chastity, poverty and obedience; he fulfilled them, as he fulfilled all the other duties of his position, with simplicity and gentleness, the certain indices of an honest soul, vowed to good by the inclination of the natural instinct, as well as by the power and solidity of religious convictions.

Almost every evening he came to the chateau to make the fourth at whist. The journalist, who recognized his true worth, showed so much deference for him that they soon grew to be in sympathy with each other, as are all men of intelligence when they find a compeer, or a listener. Every sword loves its scabbard.

"But you, who find yourself by your devotion above your position, to what do you attribute this state of things?"

"I will not answer you with commonplaces, after such a flattering parenthesis," replied the abbé, smiling. "What is passing in this valley is taking place everywhere in France, and is a result of the hopes which the movement of 1789 infiltrated, so to speak, into the minds of the peasants. The Revolution affected certain countries more powerfully than others, and this strip of Burgundy, so near Paris, is one of the places where the movement has been understood as a triumph of the Gaul over the Frank. Historically, the peasants are still in the morrow of the Jacquerie, and their defeat is inscribed upon their brain. The fact itself is no longer remembered; it has become an instinctive idea. This idea is in the peasant blood, as the idea of superiority was formerly. The Revolution of 1789 was the revenge of the conquered. The peasants have got a foothold in the possession of the soil, which was interdicted to them for twelve hundred years by the feudal law. Hence their love for the land, which they share among themselves, even to cutting a furrow in two, which often prevents the collection of the taxes, for the value of the property is not sufficient to cover the expense of the legal costs."

"Their obstinacy and defiance is such," interrupted Blondet, "that in a thousand out of the three thousand cantons of which French territory is composed, it is impossible for a rich man to purchase the property of a peasant. The peasants, who will sell their little bits of land to each other, will not part with them at any price to a bourgeois. The more money a large proprietor offers the more does the vague distrust of the peasant increase. Legal dispossession alone will bring the property of the peasant under the common law of barter. Many have observed this fact, but no one seems to know the reason for it."

"The reason is this," replied the abbe, rightly construing Blondet's pause as equivalent to an interrogation. "Twelve centuries are nothing for a caste which the historic spectacle of civilization has never diverted from its principal thought, and which still wears proudly the broad-brimmed, silk-wound hat of its masters, ever since an abandoned fashion left it for them. The love whose root lies in the innermost parts of the people, and which attached itself violently to Napoleon, who was less in its secret than he imagined himself to be, and which may explain the miracle of his return in 1815,

proceeded solely from this idea. In the eyes of the people, Napoleon, who was everlastingly bound to them by his million of soldiers, is the king who has come forth from the loins of the Revolution, the man who assures to them the possession of landed property. His coronation was steeped in this idea."

"An idea upon which 1814 had a disastrous effect, and which the monarchy should hold sacred," said Blondet quickly; "for the people may find near the throne a prince to whom his father bequeathed the head of Louis XVI. as an heirloom."

"Here is madame; say no more," said Brossette in a low voice. "Fourchon frightened her; and we must keep her here, in the interests of religion and the throne, to say nothing of the estate itself."

Michaud had probably been brought to the chateau by the attempt perpetrated beneath Vatel's eyes. But before giving the result of the deliberation which had just taken place in the council of state, the march of events demands a concise narrative of the circumstances under which the general had purchased les Aigues, the grave reasons which had made Sibilet the land-steward of this magnificent property, the causes which had led to the appointment of Michaud as head keeper, and the antecedents which had led to the situation of mind and the fears expressed by Sibilet.

This rapid review will have the advantage of introducing some of the principal actors in the drama, of outlining their interests, and of describing the dangers of the situation in which General Montcornet now found himself.

VI.

A TALE OF ROBBERY.

When paying a visit to her property about 1791, Mademoiselle Laguerre engaged as steward the son of the former bailiff of Soulanges, a man by the name of Gaubertin. The little city of Soulanges, now nothing more than the county town of a canton, was the capital of a considerable district in the times when the houses of France and Burgundy were waging war against each other. Ville-aux-Fayes, where the sous-prefecture is located today, was then subject to Soulanges, as were Aigues, Ronquerolles, Cerneux, Conches and fifteen other parishes. The Soulanges have remained simple counts, while at the present day the Ronquerolles are marquises, thanks to that sovereign power called the court which raised the son of Captain du Plessis to a dukedom and gave him precedency over the first families of the conquest. This proves that the destiny of cities, like that of families, is variable.

The bailiff's son, a penniless bachelor, succeeded to a steward who had grown rich during his thirty years of power and chose to step down and out in order to take a third share in the famous Minoret company that collected the revenues of Aigues. It was in his own interest that the future commissary nominated as intendant Francois Gaubertin, who had been his accountant for five years and who, to show his gratitude to the master who had initiated him into the secrets of their profession, promised to obtain for him an acquittance from Mademoiselle Laguerre, whose mind was ill at ease on account of the Revolution. The ex-bailiff, now public prosecutor of the department, was the protector of the timid songstress. This provincial Fouquier-Tinville incited a spurious emeute against a queen of the stage, who was evidently become suspected by reason of her connection with the aristocracy, in order that his son might have the merit of being her apparent savior, and in this way they obtained an acquittance for the former incumbent. Thereon Citizeness Laguerre made Francois Gaubertin her prime minister, partly from policy, partly from gratitude.

The future purveyor of provisions to the armies of the Republic had not wished to spoil mademoiselle by high living: he transmitted to Paris about thirty thou-

sand livres annually, whereas Aigues must have produced at the very least forty thousand in those days; the diva in her innocence was consequently greatly surprised when Gaubertin promised her thirty-six.

In order to account for the fortune of the *régisseur* of Aigues we must go back to the beginning. Through his father's influence young Gaubertin was elected mayor of Blangy. He was able, therefore, in spite of the law of the land, having it in his power to intensify or mitigate the severity of the crushing requisitions of the Republic, by *terrorizing* (a newly coined expression) the debtors of the State to extract from them gold and silver in payment of their dues. The worthy steward turned in assignats to his employer in settlement of his accounts so long as this paper money continued to be current, which, if it did not increase the public wealth, made many private fortunes. In the course of three years, from 1792 to 1795, young Gaubertin made at Aigues a hundred and fifty thousand livres, with which he operated at Paris. Mademoiselle Laguerre, with more assignats than she knew what to do with, was obliged to raise money on her diamonds, which were of no further use to her; she gave them to Gaubertin, who sold them and faithfully returned the proceeds in silver. Such an instance of probity touched mademoiselle deeply; her confidence in Gaubertin after that was as great as in Piccini.

In 1796, when he took to wife the Citizeness Isaure Mouchon, daughter of an old friend of his father in the days of the Convention, Gaubertin was worth three hundred and fifty thousand francs in coin, and as the stability of the Directorate appeared to him a matter of some doubt, he wished to have mademoiselle approve the accounts of his five years' stewardship, excusing himself on the ground that he was about to make a new departure.

"I shall be a family man," said he. "You know the reputation that intendants generally have; my father-in-law is a Republican of more than Roman integrity, and a man of influence besides; I desire to show him that I am worthy to be connected with him."

Mademoiselle Laguerre approved Gaubertin's accounts in the most flattering terms.

In order to gain the confidence of the lady of Aigues the *régisseur* tried in the beginning to keep the peasants in check, fearing, and with good reason, that the revenue would suffer from their devastations, and that his own bonus from the wood-merchant would be cut down; but in those times the sovereign people were everywhere making themselves very much at home; madame, on seeing her kings so hear at hand, was afraid of them, and told her Richelieu that it was her desire, above all things, to die in peace. The income of the former ornament of the stage was so much in excess of her expenditure that she allowed the most fatal precedents to be established. To avoid a lawsuit she suffered her neighbors to trench on her property. Her park being surrounded by walls too lofty to be scaled, she had no fear of being disturbed in her present enjoyments, and, like the true philosopher she was, demanded nothing but tranquillity. A few thousand francs of income more or less, the reductions in his lease exacted by the wood-merchant to pay for the depredations committed by the peasants, what were those things to the careless, prodigal ex-cantatrice, whose hundred thousand francs of yearly revenue had all been spent on her pleasures and who had submitted without a murmur to a reduction of two-thirds on her sixty thousand francs of rental?

"Ha!" said she, with the insouciance of the high liver of the old régime, "every one must live, even the Republic!"

Mademoiselle Cochet, confidential maid and female grand vizier to her ladyship, had attempted to enlighten her mistress, when she saw the ascendency that Gaubertin was acquiring over her whom he at first called *Madame*, notwithstanding the laws concerning equality; but Gaubertin, in turn, enlightened Mademoiselle Cochet, by producing a denunciation *said to have been* received by his father, the public prosecutor, in which she was accused of

being in correspondence with Pitt and Coburg. From that time forth the pair reigned with divided authority, but after the fashion of Montgomery; Cochet would speak a good word for Gaubertin in Mademoiselle Laguerre's ear, and he would do the same for her. The female attendant's bed was already made, moreover; she knew that she was down in madame's will for sixty thousand francs. Madame was so habituated to the Cochet that she could not dispense with her; the girl knew all the secrets of her dear mistress's toilet, she had a thousand pretty tales with which to bring sleep to dear mistress's eyes at night, and a store of flatteries with which to awake her in the morning; finally, she never could see any change in dear mistress up to the day of her death, and when dear mistress was in her grave, she doubtless found her better looking there than ever.

The yearly pickings of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet, in the way of salary and perquisites, became so considerable, that had they been the dear creature's own father and mother their affection for her could not have been greater. No one can tell the extent to which the rogue makes much of and pets his dupe; no mother is so loving and attentive toward a cherished daughter as is one of these Tartuffes toward the cow that he is milking for his own special benefit. What success attends the representation of "Tartuffe" played before a private audience! That shows the value of friendship. Molière died too early; he should have given us Orgon maddened by the persecutions of his family and children, longing for Tartuffe's flatteries, and saying: "Those were the good old times!"

During the last eight years of her life, Mademoiselle Laguerre did not receive more than thirty thousand francs of the fifty which the Aigues property actually yielded. Gaubertin, as we may see, had attained the same administrative results as his predecessor, although rents and the price of all kinds of country produce had materially increased between 1791 and 1815, to say nothing of the additions that Mademoiselle Laguerre was constantly making to her domain. But the scheme by virtue of which Gaubertin hoped to obtain possession of Aigues at madame's death compelled him to keep this magnificent estate in a condition of apparent poverty as to its visible income. The Cochet had been initiated into the project and was to have a share of the profits. As the former ornament of the stage in her declining days, with a fortune in the funds styled consolidated (the language of finance often serves to conceal a good joke) which paid her an annual interest of twenty thousand livres, spent barely the twenty thousand francs aforesaid, it amazed her to hear of the fresh acquisitions her steward was making year after year to employ the surplus funds, for she had hitherto always spent her income before she received it. She attributed the diminishing requirements of her old age to the honesty of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet.

"They are a pair of pearls!" she said to those who came to see her.

Gaubertin, moreover, was careful that his accounts should appear perfectly regular. He charged himself rigorously on the books with all the rentals; everything that was to undergo the inspection of the cantatrice, whose strong point was not arithmetic, was clear, lucid and precise. It was in the items of expenditure that the steward found his profits: the cost of breaking up new land, fencing and draining, commissions to brokers, repairs, the new processes he invented, details which madame never thought of investigating, and which he oftentimes made double what they should be, thanks to the connivance of contractors, whose silence was purchased by advantageous bargains. This easy way of doing business acquired for Gaubertin the esteem of the public, and madame's praises were in the mouth of every one; for besides what she distributed in works of public utility, she spent a great deal in charity.

"God bless and save her, dear lady!" was what every one said.

Everybody, in fact, got something from her, either as a gift out and out or indirectly. As if in atonement for the errors

of her youth the aged *artiste* was conscientiously pillaged, and pillaged in such an artistic way that every one imposed a certain degree of restraint on himself, so that the matter should not be carried to such a length as to open her eyes and make her sell Aigues and return to Paris to live.

It is to this interest of banded plunder that is to be attributed the murder of Paul Louis Courier, who was so imprudent as to mention his intention of selling his property and removing his wife, off whom several Tonsards of Touraine were living. With this example before their eyes, the plunderers of Aigues hesitated to kill the goose that laid them golden eggs; they would not cut down a young tree except as a measure of last necessity, when their longest poles were too short to reach the persimmons in the topmost branches. In the interest of their own peculations, they did as little mischief as possible. In spite of all, however, during the last years of Mademoiselle Laguerre's life, the usage of going to the forest to collect wood had degenerated into a most shameless abuse; on some moonlight nights, no less than two hundred fagots would be bundled up and carried off. And as for gleanage and *ballebotage*, Aigues lost by them one-fourth of its products, as Sibilet has shown.

Mademoiselle Laguerre had laid an injunction on Cochet's marrying during her lifetime, prompted by a sort of proprietary feeling as between mistress and maid, of which examples are not infrequent, and which is not more ridiculous than our mania for holding on until our last gasp to wealth that can do us no earthly good, at the risk of being poisoned by our impatient heirs. Twenty days after Mademoiselle Laguerre's funeral, therefore, Mademoiselle Cochet was married to the corporal of the gendarmerie of Soulanges, a man by the name of Soudry, very good-looking and about forty-two years old, who, ever since the time when the gendarmerie was created in 1800, had been coming to Aigues almost daily to visit her, and was in the habit of dining at least four days out of the seven with her and Gaubertin.

All her life long madame had taken her meals in solitary state, unless when she had company. Never, notwithstanding the terms of familiarity on which they lived, were Cochet and the Gaubertins admitted to the table of the leading lady of the Royal Academy of Music and the Dance, who, to the last breath she drew, retained all the awful majesty her position gave her, with all the paraphernalia—carriage, horses, servants, rouge and high-heeled slippers—thereto pertaining. She reigned upon the stage, she reigned in social life, and she continued to reign in the retirement of the country, where her memory is still respected and where she occupies, to the minds of the best society of Soulanges, a position certainly not inferior to any member of the court of Louis Seize.

This man Soudry, who commenced to make love to the Cochet almost as soon as he made his appearance in the country, was the owner of the finest house in Soulanges; his pay was about six thousand francs and he had a prospect of a pension of four hundred francs whenever he should leave the service. The Cochet, once she had changed her name to Soudry, was treated with the highest consideration in Soulanges. She maintained the strictest silence as to the amount of her savings, which, like Gaubertin's funds, were invested at Paris with a person named Leclercq, agent for the wine-dealers of the department and himself a native of the country, in whose business the steward had a silent interest; but if public opinion was to be believed, the ci-devant lady's maid was one of the first fortunes in that little town of some twelve hundred souls.

Much to the surprise of the entire country-side, Monsieur and Madame Soudry in their marriage contract legitimized a natural son of the gendarme, whom this action would entitle to inherit Madame Soudry's fortune. On the very day when this son had a mother officially bestowed upon him, he concluded his law studies at Paris, where

he proposed to serve his apprenticeship in order to prepare himself for a place in the magistracy.

It is hardly necessary to state that a mutual understanding extending over a period of twenty years had engendered a friendship of the firmest kind between the Gaubertins and the Soudrys. To the very last day of their lives they gave themselves out, *urbi et orbi*, to be the most upright, the honestest, the best people in the entire realm of France. This mutual liking that two men bear each other, based on the reciprocal knowledge of the dark stains there are on the white tunic of their conscience, constitutes one of the most difficult ties to loosen there are in this wide world. You, my friend, who are reading this social drama, are so well assured of this that to explain the duration of certain friendships that put your egotism to the blush, you say of the two devoted ones: "Surely they must have committed some awful crime together!"

After an incumbency of five and twenty years the steward found himself owner of a snug fortune of six hundred thousand francs, and the fair Cochet had in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty thousand. The activity with which these funds were turned over and over by the firm of Leclercq & Co., Quai de Bethune, Ile Saint Louis, rivals in business of the house of Grandet & Co., assisted materially in building up the huge fortune of the commission merchant as well as that of Gaubertin. At Mademoiselle Laguerre's death Jenny, the intendant's oldest daughter, was sought in marriage by Leclercq, the head of the house in the Quai de Bethune. Gaubertin was at that time flattering himself with hopes of becoming master of Aigues, by virtue of a plot hatched in the office of Maître Lupin, the notary, whom he had set up in business at Soulanges twelve years previously.

Lupin, son of the last intendant of the Soulanges family, had lent himself to various not strictly honorable practices: appraisements at fifty per cent under value, advertisements published in obscure journals; all the methods, in fine, that are unfortunately so common in the country by which great properties are frequently knocked down to favored parties for a great deal less than they are worth. Of late, they say, a company has been formed at Paris that has for its object to extort money from these wily individuals by threatening to outbid them. But in 1816 the fierce light of the daily press did not beat upon France as it does at the present day, and the accomplices might safely count on the success of their scheme for partitioning the Aigues property in secret between la Cochet, the notary and Gaubertin, who promised himself, *in petto*, to secure the others' shares by a payment of ready money as soon as the property should be in his name. The lawyer employed by Lupin to look after the partition sale had sold his business on credit to Gaubertin for the latter's son, so that he was quite ready to wink at this robbery if so be that any of the eleven farmers of Picardy, to whom this inheritance was such an unexpected windfall, should consider himself robbed.

Just as all the parties in interest were soothing themselves with the belief that their fortunes were to be increased twofold, there came a lawyer from Paris on the very day before the sale, whose object was to commission one of the lawyers of Ville-aux-Fayes (who had formerly been a clerk in the Parisian lawyer's office) to purchase Aigues, and the property was knocked down to him for a million one hundred thousand and fifty francs. None of the conspirators dared go above the bid of eleven hundred thousand francs. Gaubertin believed there was foul play on Soudry's part, just as Lupin and Soudry believed themselves defrauded by Gaubertin, but the decree of sale reconciled them. The lawyer of Ville-aux-Fayes, although suspecting the existence of a plot on the part of Gaubertin, Lupin and Soudry, did not think best to inform his old employer, and for this reason: Should the new owners see fit to blab, the conspirators would soon make it so hot for the ministerial functionary that he would have to leave the country. This reticence, quite characteristic of the provincial, will be fully justified, moreover, by the out-

come of this story. If the provincial is sly and secretive, it is because he is compelled to be; his justification lies in the perils that environ him, expressed most admirably in the proverb: "*One must howl with the wolves!*" which explains the meaning of the character of Philinte.

When General Montcornet took possession of Aigues, Gaubertin did not consider himself sufficiently wealthy to give up his place. In order to secure the rich banker as his son-in-law, he had had to pay a dowry of two hundred thousand francs with his oldest daughter; the business he had purchased for his son would cost him thirty thousand francs; there were left him therefore only three hundred and seventy thousand francs, from which he would sooner or later have to take the dowry of Eliza, his second daughter, for whom he proposed to arrange a match fully as advantageous as that of her elder sister. The régisseur thought he would study the Comte de Montcornet for a while to see if there was not a possibility of his becoming disgusted with Aigues, in which event he would turn to his own individual account the conception that had come to naught.

With the cunning peculiar to those who have acquired their wealth by underhanded means, Gaubertin thought, and not without a good deal of reason, too, that between an old soldier and an old cantatrice there must be many points of resemblance. A child of the Opera, an old general of Napoleon's, must not their habits of prodigality, their reckless insouciance be indentical? Does not wealth bestow its favors capriciously, blindly, on the soldier as well as on the actress? If we encounter military men who are shrewd, politic and far-seeing, is it not the exception rather than the rule? Most frequently, on the contrary, the soldier, especially when he is a hard-riding, tough old cavalry officer, is simple, confiding, a greenhorn in business and not likely to bother his head with the wearisome, countless details involved in a supervision of his property. Gaubertin flattered himself that he should be able to take and keep the general in the same toils in which Mademoiselle Laguerre had ended her days. But it so chanced that the emperor had once, of malice prepense, suffered Montcornet to be in Pomerania what Gaubertin now was at Aigues; the general therefore had some knowledge of stewards and their ways.

In coming to Aigues to plant cabbages, to use the first Duc de Biron's expression, the old cavalry officer wished to have an occupation to occupy his mind in order that he might cease to remember his disgrace. He had turned his army corps over to the Bourbons, a service that had been performed by many another general and styled the disbandment of the Army of the Loire; but never could he atone for his crime in having ridden behind the Man of the Hundred Days on his last battlefield. It was impossible for the peer of 1815, in presence of the foreigner, to keep his name on the army list; still less could he remain at the Luxembourg. Montcornet, therefore, accepted the advice of a marshal, disgraced like himself, and took himself off to cultivate carrots and turnips. The general had his share of that acuteness that is often met with among the old wolves of the watch-fire, and he had not much more than begun to look into his affairs than he recognized in Gaubertin a true type of the steward of the old régime, a rascal, one of the kind that Napoleon's dukes and marshals, those mushrooms spawned from the dregs of the populace, met so many of in their experience.

The sagacious officer of cuirassiers, perceiving Gaubertin's peculiar aptitude in all matters pertaining to rustic administration, felt what a good thing it would be to retain him until he himself should be somewhat better posted in the minutiæ of his new and unsought occupation. He accordingly assumed an air of cheerful insouciance, imitative of Mademoiselle Laguerre, which threw the steward off his guard. This seeming silliness lasted exactly so long as the general was acquainting himself with the strong and weak points of the property, the state of the revenue, the manner of collecting it,

how and where his people were robbing him, the improvements and economies that were necessary. Then, having caught Gaubertin one fine morning with his hand in the bag, to use the time-honored expression, the general fell into one of those towering rages that come so natural to your conquering hero. He made that day a great mistake, one of those mistakes that are as likely as not to alter the entire existence of a man not blessed with his wealth and firmness, and from which sprung the ills, great and small, with which this veracious history is crowded. Brought up in the imperial school, accustomed to mow down all before him with his saber, scorning the pékins with a most righteous scorn, Montcornet did not consider it necessary to use much ceremony when it came to turning a rascally steward out of doors. Civil life, with its thousand snares and pit-falls, was unknown ground to this general whose temper was already soured by disgrace; he therefore humiliated Gaubertin most bitterly, who moreover drew down upon himself this tongue-lashing by a retort that excited Montcornet to fury by its cynicism.

"You are living off my land!" the comte said to him with sarcastic severity.

"Did you think I had been drawing my living from above?" Gaubertin replied with a laugh.

"Out of here, out with you, you dog! I discharge you!" roared the general, raining blows upon him with his horse-whip, though the steward has always denied having been struck, the scene having passed behind closed doors.

"I am not going without my *quitus*," Gaubertin coolly answered when he had put the table between himself and the irate soldier.

"We shall see what they will have to say to you in the police court," Montcornet replied with a shrug of the shoulders.

When Gaubertin heard himself threatened with a suit in the police court, he looked the comte in the face and smiled. That smile had the effect of relaxing the general's arm as if the sinews had suddenly been cut. What could have been the meaning of that smile?

Some two years before, Gaubertin's brother-in-law, a man named Gendrin, who had long been judge of the tribunal of first instance at la Ville-aux-Fayes, had been made president of the court through the influence of the Comte de Soulanges. Monsieur de Soulanges, who had been made a peer in 1814, and had remained faithful to the Bourbons through the Hundred Days, had applied for this appointment to the Garde des Sceaux. This relationship gave Gaubertin a certain amount of importance in the country, for a president of tribunal in a small town is, relatively speaking, a more exalted personage than the first president of a royal court, who finds sundry luminaries in the departmental capital to dim his own effulgence, to wit, the bishop, the prefect, the receiver-general, while a simple president of tribunal has nothing of this sort to contend against, the king's attorney and the sub-prefect being officers that are removable at will. Young Soudry, who was young Gaubertin's inseparable companion at Paris as well as at Aigues, had just been appointed substitute to the procureur in the capital of the department. Soudry, senior, who, before he bloomed out into a corporal of gendarmes, was a sergeant of artillery, had been wounded in battle while protecting Monsieur de Soulanges, then holding a position on the staff. At the time when the gendarmerie was created the Comte de Soulanges, at that time a colonel, had obtained the corporalcy at Soulanges for the man who saved his life, and later he solicited the position for Soudry, junior, in which that young man was now beginning his career. Finally, the marriage of Mademoiselle Gaubertin being now fixed so that it was beyond the power of the people in the Quai de Bethune to withdraw, the faithless steward felt that he was a greater power in the country than a lieutenant-general who had been shelved.

If there were no other moral attaching to this history than that which is to be

found in the quarrel between the general and his steward, it would still be of use to many persons for their guidance in the affairs of life. To him who reads his Machiavelli understandingly, it is made clear that man's highest prudence consists in never threatening, in acting without speaking, in making a golden bridge for the flying enemy, and in not stepping, as the proverb has it, on the serpent's tail; finally, in refraining from wounding the amour-propre of our inferiors as we would refrain from sacrilege. Deeds, no matter how prejudicial they may be to others' interests, are forgiven in the long run, and may be explained and accounted for; but our self-love, which never ceases to bleed from a wound received, no matter how long ago, never forgets, never pardons. Our moral being is more sensitive, more living, so to speak, than our physical; the heart and arteries are less readily affected than the nerves. In a word, our inner being dominates us, say and do what we may. There is a possibility of reconciling two families that have declared vendetta against each other, as in Brittany or La Vendée in the time of the civil wars, but the robbed and the robber are not to be reconciled, more than are the detractor and his victim. It is only in melodrama that enemies rail and scold before transfixing each other with their swords. The savage and the peasant, who is allied to the savage, never speak except to ensnare their adversary. Ever since 1789, France has been trying, in direct opposition to all the evidence, to make men believe that they are equal; you may say to a man: "You are a rascal!" and the matter is passed over as a joke, but only prove the fact by catching that man red-handed, and horsewhipping him, only threaten to hale him before the police court, and then you demonstrate the fact that all men are *not* equal. If the masses cannot forgive their betters their superiority, how shall we expect the rascal to pardon the honest man?

Montcornet should have dismissed his steward and given his place to an old soldier, under pretext of discharging an ancient obligation, in which case neither Gaubertin nor the general would have been deceived, and the latter, sparing the former's amour-propre, would have afforded him a door by which he might retreat; Gaubertin would in that case have left the rich landowner to himself, would have forgotten his downfall amid the battles of the auction-room, and might perhaps have gone to Paris to seek employment for his capital. But the régisseur, driven from the door like a dog, conceived against his quondam master one of those implacable enmities that constitute an element of provincial life, and which, by their vindictiveness and persistency, and by the plots and schemes to which they give rise, would astonish the diplomats, who are wont to be astonished by nothing under the sun. An insatiable thirst for revenge counseled him to retire to Ville-aux-Fayes, gain a position there whence he might do Montcornet all the mischief possible, and raise up against him such a host of enemies that he would ultimately be compelled to sell the Aigues property.

Everything conspired to mislead and deceive the general, for Gaubertin's exterior was not calculated to alarm him or put him on his guard. It was a settled principle of long standing with the régisseur to affect, not poverty, but straitened circumstances. It was a rule of conduct that had been instilled in him by his predecessor. For the last twelve years, therefore, he had never failed in and out of season, whenever the occasion offered, to make a great to-do about his three children, his wife, and the enormous expense of supporting so large a family. Mademoiselle Laguerre, when Gaubertin professed himself too poor to pay for his son's schooling, had assumed that burden. She gave her dear god-son an annual allowance of a hundred louis, for she was Claude Gaubertin's god-mother.

The following day came Master Gaubertin, accompanied by a keeper named Courtecuisse, and insolently demanded from the general his acquittance, at the same time exhibiting for the other's benefit the flattering discharge papers he had

received from mademoiselle, and he begged in terms of biting irony to be shown where he, Gaubertin, had any property, landed or otherwise. If he had taken presents, he said, from the wood-dealers and from the farmers on the renewal of their leases, it was because Mademoiselle Laguerre had always sanctioned it, and not only was she benefited pecuniarily by this course, but it also insured her peace of mind. The people of the country would have laid down their lives for mademoiselle, while by continuing his present course the general was laying up trouble for himself in the future.

Gaubertin—and this trait is not infrequent in callings where other peoples' property is appropriated by methods not contemplated by the Code—believed himself to be a strictly honest man. In the first place, the coin of the realm that he had extorted from the tenants of Mademoiselle Laguerre—who had been paid in assignats, the reader will remember—had been in his strong-box so long that he looked on it as a legitimate acquisition. It was simply a matter of exchange, and exchange is no robbery. On the whole, he didn't know but he had incurred a risk by taking the ready money. Again, looking at the matter from a legal point of view, mademoiselle was bound to take her rents in assignats. That *legal* should be a good stout adjective; it upholds many a fortune! Finally, going back to the remotest times when great properties and stewards have existed, that is to say, to the beginnings of organized society, the intendant has forged for himself a chain of reasoning very similar to that which is employed by our cooks of the present day, and which is briefly this:

"If my mistress should do her marketing herself," says dame cook, "very likely she would pay more for her provisions than I put them in at; she is a gainer by the operation, and it is better that the little profit I make should be in my pocket than in the shop-keeper's."

"Mademoiselle would never get thirty thousand francs out of les Aigues if she tried to run the property herself; the peasants, dealers and laborers would rob her of the difference: it is much better that I should have it, and think of the care and trouble I am saving her!" was what Gaubertin said to himself.

The Catholic religion alone has power to put an end to these traffickings with conscience, but since 1789 religion has ceased to exert its influence so far as two-thirds of the French people are concerned; hence it followed that the peasants, who are naturally quick-witted and prone to imitate the example of their betters, in the valley of Aigues had reached a frightful condition of demoralization. They attended mass on Sundays, it is true, but outside the church; for it was their regularly appointed place of rendezvous, where they met to talk business and make bargains.

It is time now that we should take account of all the evil and misery produced by the ex-diva's prodigal recklessness and happy-go-lucky way of managing her affairs. Mademoiselle Laguerre, with unconscious selfishness, had betrayed the cause of all those who have something, every one of whom is the object of the unrelenting hatred of those who have nothing. Since 1792 the landed proprietors of France have recognized their community of interest and acted accordingly. But, alas! if the great feudal families, far less numerous than the bourgeois families, could not see their mutual interdependence either in 1400 under Louis XI. or in 1600 under Richelieu, is there room for belief that notwithstanding the vaunted progress of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie will be more united than was the old noblesse? An oligarchy of a hundred thousand men of wealth has all the drawbacks of a democracy and none of its advantages. The egotism of the family, summed up in the sayings: "Each man for himself," "Every man's house his castle," will slay the egotism of the oligarchy, so requisite to our modern society and which we have seen carried into practice in England during the three last centuries with such wonderful results. Do what we may, the landed proprietors will never be brought to see the necessity of that discipline which makes the Church

such an admirable model of government until the time comes when they are attacked in their pockets, and then it will be too late. The audacity with which communism, the living and breathing logic of democracy, is to-day attacking the moral order of society makes it clear that the popular Samson is become more prudent, and instead of attempting to pull down the social columns of the banquet-hall is silently undermining them in the cellar.

VII.

EXTINCT SOCIAL SPECIES.

THE Aigues estate could not dispense with a steward, for it was by no means the general's intention to renounce the pleasures of the winter season at Paris, where he had a splendid mansion in the Rue Neuve des Mathurins. He accordingly went to work to hunt up a successor to Gaubertin, but he certainly pursued his quest with less ardor than was displayed by Gaubertin to impose on the old warrior a man of his selection.

There is no confidential post that calls for more special knowledge and more activity than does the stewardship of a great estate. This difficulty is experienced only by certain wealthy proprietors whose property is situated outside the circumference of a circle described about the capital, commencing at a distance of some forty leagues. At that point there is an end of the great farms whose products find an assured outlet in the Parisian markets, and which afford large and certain incomes, secured by long leases that never go begging for lack of purchasers, frequently men of great wealth. These gentlemen farmers come in their own carriage to pay their rent, bringing great rolls of bank-notes, unless their factor in the Halles may be charged to make the settlement. Thus it is that in the departments of Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, Oise, Eure-et-Loire, Seine-Inférieure and Loiret, there are farms which have cost their owners such a pretty penny that they do not always return one and a half per cent on the investment. This yield is enormous when compared with the yield of farm property in England, Holland and Belgium; but at fifty leagues from Paris the management of a large farm calls for so many different processes, the products are so diverse, that it is really a manufacturing industry, with all the attendant risks. A wealthy proprietor is neither more nor less than a merchant, obliged to seek a market for his goods, just as the manufacturer has to find an outlet for the products of his looms and smelting furnaces. Nay, he has even competition to contend against: the peasant and the small farmer make things warm for him by having recourse to expedients that cannot be used by self-respecting persons.

An intendant must be acquainted with surveying, must have the customs and usages of the country at his finger-ends, together with its markets and trade peculiarities; he must possess a smattering of law that he may protect the interests intrusted to him, must be a competent bookkeeper, and enjoy the most robust health; in addition to these things, it will be well for him if he has a fondness for athletics and horseback riding. It will not answer for the intendant to be a man of the people, having as he does to represent the master and be in daily contact with him. As there are few stewards whose salary amounts to as much as a thousand crowns, this problem would seem to be insoluble. How are all these virtues to be obtained at a moderate price in a land where those who possess them have an abundance of other occupations open to them? You may bring in a man who is a stranger to the country, but the probability is that it will cost you a great deal of money while he is gathering experience. Or you may take a young man to the manor born and break him in, in which case the chances are ten to one he will prove ungrateful and you will wish you hadn't. And so you may take your choice: on the one hand gross ignorance and doltish stupidity, on the other

brains and intelligence always on the look-out for number one. Hence this social nomenclature and the natural history of the species intendant, described in these terms by a great Polish nobleman: "We have two sorts of régisseurs," he used to say, "the one who thinks of himself alone and the one who thinks of us and himself; happy the employer who falls in with the latter! As for the sort that thinks only of us, that is a *rara avis*, and has never been met with yet."

We have elsewhere seen something of a steward who had his master's interests, conjointly with his own, at heart (see "A Start in Life," in SCENES FROM PRIVATE LIFE); Gaubertin is the intendant occupied exclusively with his own fortune. To present to our readers the third term of the worthy Pole's proposition would be to expose to the admiration of the public an improbable character, and yet one that the nobility has known in its day (see "The Collection of Antiques," in SCENES FROM PROVINCIAL LIFE), but that has unfortunately vanished with it. The perpetual division of our great fortunes must necessarily effect a great modification in the manners of our aristocracy. If there are not in France at the present day twenty great fortunes managed by stewards, fifty years hence there will not be a hundred great estates controlled by intendants, unless changes are made in the civil law. Every wealthy landowner will watch over his own interests. This transformation, which has already begun, suggested to a witty old lady the reply she made to some one who asked her why it was that since 1830 she had been spending all her summers in Paris: "I have given up visiting at the chateaux since their owners have converted them into farms." But what is to be the outcome of the struggle, daily growing fiercer and fiercer, between man and man, rich and poor? It is with the sole purpose of casting some light on this tremendous social problem that the author has written this essay on country life and customs.

The reader may divine the perplexities that beset the old general when he had discharged Gaubertin. Like any other man free to do a thing or refrain from doing it, he had said to himself in a casual sort of way: "I will discharge that rascal;" but he had failed to take his own personal equation into account, had not reckoned with his impetuous, fiery disposition and the old rough-rider's red-hot rage that was only waiting to blaze up until the discovery of some delinquency should loose the seals from his self-bandaged eyes.

Montcornet, a child of Paris, now a landowner for the first time, had neglected to provide himself with a steward in advance, and when he had studied the lay of the land, he saw how absolutely indispensable to a man of his character and disposition was a go-between of some sort to communicate between him and so many and such ill-conditioned people.

Gaubertin, who, in the course of the two hours that their quarrel lasted, had formed a pretty shrewd idea of the quandary in which the general would presently find himself, left the room that had witnessed the dispute, and mounting his nag, galloped off to Soulanges and there summoned the Soudrys in solemn conclave. When he said, "We have parted company, the general and I; we must give him a steward of our selection without his knowing it; who shall it be?" the Soudrys knew what was going on in their friend's mind. It is not to be forgotten that Corporal Soudry, who had been for seventeen years at the head of the cantonal police, had the benefit of the experience which his wife had acquired while she was confidential maid to a theatrical lady.

"It will be a cold day," said Madame Soudry, "before you find any one equal to our poor Sibilet."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Gaubertin, his face still scarlet from the affronts he had swallowed. "I say, Lupin," he said to the notary, who was present at the conference, "do you run over to Ville-aux-Fayes and put a flea in Maréchal's ear in case that big braggart of a cuirassier should go to him for advice."

Maréchal was the lawyer whom his

former employer, who had charge of the general's Parisian business, had naturally enough recommended to Monsieur de Montcornet as legal adviser after the purchase of Aigues.

Sibilet was a notary's clerk and eldest son of the clerk of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes; he had not a penny to bless himself with, was twenty-five years old, and madly in love with a young lady of Soulanges, daughter of the justice of the peace.

This worthy magistrate, Sarcus by name, with a salary of fifteen hundred francs, had married a penniless young lady, the oldest sister of Monsieur Vermut, the apothecary at Soulanges. Although an only daughter, Mademoiselle Sarcus, whose face was her fortune, could not well have lived on the meager pay of a provincial notary's clerk. Young Sibilet, who was related to Gaubertin by one of those obscure ties that make pretty much all the inhabitants of our small towns cousins to one another, had an ill-paid place in the land office that he owed to the influence of Gaubertin and his father. The miserable youth had the doubtful pleasure of being a father twice in three years. The clerk of the court had five other children dependent on him, and could do nothing to assist his oldest son. The justice of the peace had only the house he lived in at Soulanges, and his income was one hundred crowns. Young Madame Sibilet, therefore, spent most of her time at her father's with her two children. Adolphe Sibilet, whose business called him away from home a good deal, came to see his Adeline from time to time. It may be that marriage, viewed under such aspects, explains the fecundity of our women.

Gaubertin's exclamation, though this brief sketch of young Sibilet's life will assist the reader's understanding of it, requires further explanation.

Adolphe Sibilet, who, as our sketch of him may have shown, was as ungainly as he well could be, was one of those men who can only reach a woman's heart by the way of the mayor's office and the altar. Endowed with a suppleness like that of a spring of well-tempered steel, he would yield the point at issue only to go back to it again at a more favorable occasion; this deceptive disposition may be said to resemble cowardice, but his apprenticeship to business in the office of a country notary had induced in Sibilet the habit of concealing this defect under an appearance of gruffness that simulated a strength he was far from possessing. Many a man hides his emptiness under an assumed bruskness; be brusk with him in turn and you will see him collapse like a punctured toy balloon. So much for the court clerk's son. But as men, for the most part, are not very observing, and as of those who are three-fourths observe only the effect without seeking to find the cause, Adolphe Sibilet's truculent air passed for rude candor, for a capacity that his employer highly extolled, and for a repulsive probity that had never been tried in the fire of temptation. There are people who derive advantage from their faults just as others do from their virtues.

Adeline Sarcus was a good-looking young person, who had been brought up by her mother (deceased three years before her daughter's marriage) with as much care as a mother can bestow on an only daughter in a small country town; the girl had loved the young and attractive Lupin, only son of the notary of Soulanges. Lupin's father, as soon as he became aware of this incipient romance, having his eye on Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin as a wife for his son and heir, bundled young Amaury Lupin off to Paris to his correspondent, Master Crottat, the notary, where, persuading himself and others that he was learning to engross deeds and draw contracts, Amaury was guilty of various foolish actions, and successfully cultivated a very promising crop of debts, being incited thereunto by a certain Georges Marest, a clerk in the office and a young man of wealth, who undertook to exhibit to him the mysteries of Paris. When Maître Lupin went to Paris to bring home his boy, Adeline was already Madame Sibilet. When the amorous Adolphe presented himself as a suitor, indeed, the old justice of the peace, under

the urging of the elder Lupin, hastened the marriage, and Adeline gave her consent out of her hopeless despair.

It cannot be said that the land-office offers a brilliant career. Like many of those posts that offer no future, it is a sort of governmental dust-bin into which rubbish is shot. Adolphe, working from early morning until late at night, soon discovered how dark and unproductive was his hole, and so, as he trotted about from village to village, spending his scanty earnings on shoe-leather and traveling expenses, he did a great deal of hard thinking on the subject of finding another place that should be permanent and pay him better. No one can imagine, unless he be cross-eyed and have two children born in lawful wedlock, the ambition that three years of mingled love and misery had developed in this young man, whose mental and physical vision alike were affected by strabismus and whose happiness was ill-assured, not to say halting. The moving cause of most concealed meannesses and petty delinquencies is doubtless an incomplete happiness. Man accepts more resignedly, perhaps, a misery destitute of hope than those alternations of love and sunshine with constant rain. If the body contracts disease, the mind contracts the leprosy of envy. In baser souls this leprosy becomes a cupidity that is at once cowardly and brutal, daring and timorous; in minds of finer mold it engenders anti-social doctrines, that are used as a ladder to enable one to dominate his superiors. Might not a proverb be formed from this idea: "Tell me what you have, and I will tell you what are your opinions?"

Although he loved his wife, Adolphe was constantly saying to himself: "I have done a foolish thing! I have three shackles and only two legs! I should have delayed marrying until I had made my fortune. It is always easy to find an Adeline, and Adeline will keep me from finding a fortune."

Adolphe, who as we have said was related to Gaubertin, had visited the latter three times in three years. The few words they exchanged showed Gaubertin that his relative's heart was of that black mud that fructifies and brings forth flowers of evil under the burning conceptions of legal robbery. He artfully sounded the depths of that character that was ready to embrace any scheme, no matter how base, provided only it were profitable. And at every visit Sibilet grumbled and bewailed his fate.

"Employ me, cousin," said he, "take me as clerk and make me your successor. You shall see how I will work! I feel capable of leveling mountains to give my Adeline, I won't say luxury, but decent comfort. You made Monsieur Leclercq's fortune; why can't you get me a situation at Paris, in the bank?"

"We'll see; I'll do something for you later on," replied his ambitious relative. "Meantime make all the friends you can; everythings helps."

Such being his frame of mind, Madame Soudry's letter bidding her protégé come to her in all haste, brought Adolphe hurrying to Soulanges, with a thousand castles in the air dancing before his eyes.

Old man Sarcus, to whom the Soudrys demonstrated the necessity of doing something for his son-in-law, had gone that very morning to pay his respects to the general and propose Adolphe for the vacant stewardship. By the advice of Madame Soudry, who was become quite the oracle of the little town, the old man took his daughter with him, and her appearance produced a favorable impression on the Comte de Montcornet.

"I will not decide," said the general, "until I have further references, but I will take no further steps to fill the place and meantime will endeavor to ascertain if your son-in-law possesses the necessary qualifications for it. The hope of seeing so charming a lady established at Aigues—"

"And the mother of two children, general," Adeline put in with considerable tact, by way of avoiding the old officer's gallantry.

All the general's investigations were forestalled and rendered unavailing by the admirable tactics of the Soudrys, Gaubertin and Lupin, who secured the influence of the principal persons in the

city where the royal court held its sessions: Counselor Gendrin, a distant relative of the president at Ville-aux-Fayes, Baron Bourlac, the procureur-général to whom young Soudry, the royal procureur, was indebted for his position, and Sarcus, counsel to the préfecture, a third cousin of the justice of the peace. From his lawyer at Ville-aux-Fayes, therefore, to the prefecture, which he visited in person, the general found every one well disposed toward the poor clerk in the land office—he was such an interesting young fellow, so every one said. His marriage made Sibilet as irreproachable as a novel by Miss Edgeworth, and enabled him, moreover, to pose as a disinterested person.

The time that the dismissed intendant necessarily spent at Aigues before taking his departure was turned to account by him in making trouble for his old master, the nature of which may be indicated by one occurrence out of many. On the morning he was to leave he arranged matters so as to fall in with Courtecuisse, the only keeper there was at Aigues, although the extent of the property required at least three.

"So, Monsieur Gaubertin," said Courtecuisse, "you and our bourgeois have been having words, I hear?"

"You heard of it, did you?" replied Gaubertin. "Well, yes; the general thought he could browbeat me as he used to do his cuirassiers; he don't know us Burgundians, though. Monsieur le Comte was not satisfied with the way I served him, and I was not satisfied with the way he treated me. So we discharged each other, and almost came to blows about it too, for he is a terribly violent man. Be on the lookout for him, Courtecuisse! Ah, old fellow, I was in hopes to have given you a better master—"

"I know all about that," replied the keeper, "and I would have served you faithfully. *Dame!* haven't we known each other twenty years? You got me the place in the time of poor dear mademoiselle, who is now a saint in glory. Ah, wasn't she a good woman! They don't make any like her nowadays. She was a mother to the country about her—"

"See here, Courtecuisse, don't you want to help us put up a nice little job on the old Turk?"

"Are you going to remain in the country, then? The talk was you were going to Paris."

"No, I am going into business at Ville-aux-Fayes while waiting to see how things will turn out here. The general has no idea what the neighborhood is like; he will soon make himself hated, you see. I want to see what the upshot will be. Don't you go about your work too zealously. He will tell you to ride the people rough-shod, for he is beginning to see how the cat jumps; but you are not going to be such a gaby as to run the risk of getting a sound thrashing from the folks about here, and likely something even worse, for the sake of saving him a few sticks of wood."

"He will discharge me, my dear Monsieur Gaubertin, and you know what a nice little home I have down there by the Porte d'Avonne—"

"The general will soon tire of the property," Gaubertin replied. "And if he should discharge you, you won't be long out of a place. Besides, you see those woods there," said he, pointing to the forest; "I shall have more to say about them than the owners."

"Those Parisian *Arminacs* ought to stick to their own city mud!" said the keeper.

The expression *Arminacs* (Armagnacs, Parisians, enemies of the Dukes of Burgundy) has been used as a term of reproach ever since the troubles of the fifteenth century on the marches of upper Burgundy, where it is diversely corrupted in different localities.

"He will go back there beaten!" said Gaubertin. "And some of these days we shall be cultivating the park of Aigues, for it is robbing the people that one man should set apart for his own pleasure two thousand acres of the very best land in the whole valley."

"Ah, the deuce! four hundred families might get their living off it," said Courtecuisse.

"If you want four or five acres of it for

yourself, you must help us to get the best of that old rascal."

While Gaubertin was fulminating excommunication against the doughty colonel of cuirassiers, the worthy justice of the peace was presenting to the latter his son-in-law Sibilet, together with Adeline and her children; they had all come over from Soulanges in a little wicker carriage borrowed from the justice's clerk, Monsieur Gourdon, brother to the doctor at Soulanges, and a richer man than the magistrate his master. This sight, so unworthy of the magistracy, is one that is frequently to be seen in the minor courts, where the perquisites of the clerk exceed the salary of the president, while it would be so natural to make the clerkship a salaried office and thus decrease the expense of litigation.

The comte was well pleased with the candor and dignified bearing of the old magistrate and the grace and beauty of Adeline, who both gave their pledges with the most entire good faith, being ignorant of the tacit convention between Gaubertin and Sibilet; he accorded at once to the youthful and interesting pair terms that put the position of intendant on an equality with a sub-prefectship of the first class.

A pavilion designed by Bouret with the twofold object of adding to the attractiveness of the landscape and affording shelter to the régisseur, a charming little structure where Gaubertin had lived, and of which a fair idea may be had by referring to the description of the Porte de Blangy, was assigned to the Sibilets as their dwelling-place. Mademoiselle, on account of the extent of the property and the remoteness of the market-towns that the steward had constantly to visit on business, had allowed Gaubertin the use of a horse; the general confirmed this to Gaubertin's successor. He made them an allowance of twenty-five "setiers" of wheat, three casks of wine, all the wood they could burn, hay and oats in abundance, and finally they were to have three per cent on the gross income collected. Instead of the forty thousand francs of rental that Mademoiselle Laguerre received in 1800, the general proposed to have sixty thousand in 1818, and reasonably enough, taking into consideration the great additions that had been made to the property in the interim. The new intendant, therefore, had a certain prospect before him of nearly two thousand francs of salary at no distant day. He was housed, fed and warmed gratis, his horse and poultry-yard cost him nothing, he was free of taxes, and the comte gave him permission to plant a kitchen-garden, promising not to higgle over the cost of a few days' work by the gardener. These advantages represented an additional two thousand francs. To jump from the land-office and a salary of twelve hundred francs to the superintendency of Aigues was like passing from penury to opulence.

"Only look out for my interests," said the general, "and that will not be all. First of all, I can get you the collection of the taxes of Conches, Blangy and Corneux, by dividing these villages off from the district of Soulanges. And when you shall have brought my income up to sixty thousand francs net, you shall be recompensed still further."

It happened, most unfortunately, that the worthy magistrate and Adeline were so imprudent, in the gladness of their hearts, as to mention to Madame Soudry the comte's promise relative to the tax-collectorship, never stopping to think that the collector of Soulanges was a man of the name of Guerbet, brother to the postmaster at Conches and a connection, as will be seen later, of the Gaubertins and the Gendrins.

"It won't be such an easy thing to do, my child," said Madame Soudry, "but let Monsieur le Comte go ahead and try it; you can't imagine how easily the most difficult things are often carried through at Paris. Why, I have seen the Chevalier Gluck at the feet of my late mistress, and she sang the part he wrote for her, too—and yet she would have let them chop her into mincemeat for Piccini, who was one of the nicest men that ever lived. The dear man! he never came to see madame but he took me round the waist and called me his belle friponne."

"Ah, come now!" cried the corporal when his wife told him the news, "does he think he is going to be emperor here, turn everything upside down, and make the people of the valley wheel right and left as he would the men of his regiment? What a nerve these officers have!—but let's have patience; Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles are with us. Poor old Guerbet! little does he think there is a plot to rob his rose-bush of its finest blossoms!"

Father Guerbet, the tax-gatherer of Soulanges, passed for a wit, which is equivalent to saying he was the merry-andrew of the little town; he was also one of the ornaments of Madame Soudry's drawing-room. The corporal's tirade gives a fair idea of the opinion that prevailed relatively to the bourgeois of Aigues from Couches to Ville-aux-Fayes, and Gaubertin made it his business to see that the fire should not go out for want of fuel.

Sibilet assumed the duties of his position toward the end of the autumn of the year 1817. The year '18 went by without the general once showing his face at Aigues, the preparations for his approaching marriage with Mademoiselle de Troisville, which occurred early in 1819, keeping him for the greater part of the summer in the vicinity of Alencon, where was the residence of his future father-in-law. Besides Aigues and his sumptuous hôtel at Paris, General de Montcornet enjoyed an income of sixty thousand francs from Government bonds and the pay of a lieutenant-general on the retired list. Although Napoleon had ennobled this distinguished cavalry officer, giving him a coat-of-arms with the appropriate device: SOUND THE CHARGE! Montcornet knew that his father had been a plain cabinet-maker in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and would gladly have forgotten it. He counted as nothing his grand cordon of the Legion of Honor, his cross of Saint-Louis, his hundred and forty thousand francs of income; he was dying to be made a peer of France. With the bee of aristocracy buzzing in his bonnet, the sight of a *cordon bleu* almost set him frantic. The superb cuirassier of Essling would have lapped the mud of the Pont Royal if he might thereby have secured admission to the houses of the Navarreins, the Lenoncourts, the Grandlieus, the Maufrigneuses, the d'Espards, the Vandenesses, the Verneuils, the d'Hérouvilles, the Chaulieus, etc. In 1818, when he became convinced that there was no chance of the Bonaparte family ever returning to power, Montcornet had some of his female friends hang out a sign for him in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, offering heart, hand, hôtel, fortune, all he had, if only some great family would accept him as a son-in-law.

After unheard-of efforts the Duchesse de Carigliano discovered the shoe to fit the general's foot in one of the three branches of the Troisville family, that of the vicomte, who had served under the Russian flag since 1789 until he returned from his self-imposed banishment in 1815. The vicomte, who was poor as a church-mouse, had married a Princess Scherbellof with a fortune of about a million, but two sons and three daughters had quickly impoverished him again. The family was an old and powerful one; it embraced a peer of France, the Marquis de Troisville, inheritor of the name and arms, and two deputies, blessed with a numerous progeny, whose aim in life was to secure all they could from the public crib, like fishes diving after crumbs. Montcornet was very well received on being presented by the maréchale, who was more favorably disposed toward the Bourbons than many of the duchesses created under Napoleonic auspices. The price demanded by Montcornet, in return for his fortune and conjugal tenderness and fidelity, was a commission in the Royal Guards and a patent creating him marquis and peer of France; but the three branches of the Troisville family would only promise to use their best efforts for him.

"You know what that means," the maréchale said to her old friend, who would have preferred more explicitness. "We are not the king's masters; we can only enlist his favor."

The marriage contract was drawn mak-

ing Virginie de Troisville Montcornet's sole heir. He was his wife's most devoted and humble slave, as is set forth in Blondet's letter, but had no children; meantime he had been received by Louis XVIII., who gave him the cordon of Saint-Louis, accorded him permission to quarter his own ridiculous scutcheon with the Troisville arms, and promised him a marquisate as soon as he should have shown sufficient devotion to the royal cause to entitle him to the peerage. A few days after this audience the Duc de Berri was assasinated; there was an upheaval of the Government, the Villèle ministry assumed the reins of power; all the plans concerted by the Troisvilles were disarranged, and it became necessary to look for other ministerial pegs to which to attach their wires.

"We must wait," the Troisvilles said to Montcornet, who was treated with the highest consideration in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

This will explain why it was that Aigues saw nothing of the general until May, 1820.

The great, the unspeakable delight inspired in the bosom of the cabinet-maker's son by the possession of a young, charming, gentle and accomplished wife, a Troisville, in fine, who had opened for him the doors of all the salons in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, together with the pleasures that Paris showered on him with a lavish hand, had so completely effaced the memory of the scene with the régisseur of Aigues that the general had utterly forgotten Gaubertin, even to his very name. In 1820 he took his comtesse to Aigues in order to show her the property. He checked Sibilet's accounts, and approved his proceedings without giving them very close attention; a happy man is not a higgler. The comtesse, pleased to find that the steward's wife was a presentable person, made her some gifts, as she did also to the children, with whom she diverted herself a moment.

She ordered some alterations made in the château by an architect whom she brought down with her from Paris, for it was her purpose—which made the general wild with delight—to spend six months of every year in this magnificent retreat. It took all the comte's savings to pay for the changes the architect was commissioned to make, and for the elegant furniture that was ordered from Paris. It was then that Aigues received the finishing touch that made it a monument, unique of its kind, of the artistic products of four centuries.

In 1821, the general received an urgent summons from Sibilet to come down before the beginning of May. Affairs of importance were to be considered. The nine year's lease, at thirty thousand francs, granted in 1812 by Gaubertin to a wood-dealer, would expire on the 15th of May.

Sibilet at first, jealous of his good name, refused to have anything to do with the renewal of the lease. "You know, Monsieur le Comte," he wrote, "that I do not soil my fingers with such matters." Then the wood-merchant put in a claim for the half of the indemnity which Gaubertin had extorted from him, and which Mademoiselle Laguerre had consented to pay rather than go to law. The reason of this indemnity was the way the forest was pillaged by the peasants, who acted as if they had full and entire right of cutting wood for fuel. Gravelot Brothers of Paris, wood-merchants, refused to pay the last installment of their lease, alleging, and offering to prove by experts, that the quantity of wood was less by a fifth than what it should be; and they declared that this was owing to the bad precedent established by Mademoiselle Laguerre.

"I have summoned these gentlemen to appear before the court of Ville-aux-Fayes," said Sibilet in his letter, "for they have elected to have the case tried here. I greatly fear it will go against us."

"Our bread and butter is at stake, pretty one," said the general, showing the letter to his wife. "Shall we go down to Aigues a little earlier this year than we did last?"

"Do you go; I will come and join you as soon as the weather becomes settled," replied the comtesse, who was not unwilling to be left alone at Paris.

The general, who well knew where the wound lay through which the life-blood of his revenues was leaking, started off alone, therefore, firmly resolved to treat the robbers with the utmost rigor; but, as we shall see, he reckoned without his host—and that host was Gaubertin.

VIII.

GREAT REVOLUTIONS IN A SMALL VALLEY.

"Well, Sibilet," said the general to his steward the morning after his arrival, addressing him with a familiarity that showed what a value he placed on the knowledge of the ex-clerk; "well, Sibilet, so the situation is grave, is it, to make use of parliamentary jargon?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," replied the intendant.

The lucky owner of Aigues was walking to and fro in front of the administrative offices, along a bit of ground that Madame Sibilet had appropriated to herself for a flower-garden, at the end of which commenced the broad meadows, irrigated by the magnificent canal, of which Blondet has given a description. A distant view of the Château des Aigues was to be had from there, just as from Aigues any one troubling himself to look could see the end, not the front, of the steward's pavilion.

"But where are all the difficulties you speak of?" the general continued. "I shall press the suit against the Gravelots; if we lose, it won't kill us, and I shall get so much free advertising for the lease of my woods that the successful competitor will pay me something like its true value."

"That is not the right way to look at the matter, Monsieur le Comte," Sibilet replied. "Suppose you have no bidders for the lease, what are you going to do then?"

"Cut my wood myself, and sell it."

"You mean to say you will be a wood-dealer?" said Sibilet, with a barely perceptible movement of the shoulders. "Very well. We won't stop to consider matters at this end; let's see how they will be at Paris. You will have to hire a yard, take out a license and pay the fees; there will be the river and harbor dues, there will be the octroi duty, there will be the expense of unloading and piling; finally, to find an agent you can depend on—"

"There's no use talking of it," the general abruptly interrupted, with terror on his face. "But why do you say there will be no bidders for the lease?"

"You have enemies in the country."

"And who may they be?"

"First of all, Monsieur Gaubertin."

"What, the scoundrel whose place you occupy?"

"Not so loud, Monsieur le Comte!" said Sibilet with a look of affright; "for mercy's sake, not so loud! my cook might overhear us."

"What! can't I speak my mind, and on my own property, of a wretch who plundered me?" roared the general.

"For the sake of your own tranquillity, Monsieur le Comte, come further away from the house. Monsieur Gaubertin is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Then Ville-aux-Fayes is to be congratulated. A thousand thunders! but it must be a nicely governed town!"

"Please give me your attention, Monsieur le Comte; believe me, serious matters are at stake—nothing less than your entire future here."

"I am listening. Let us go and take a seat on that bench."

"Monsieur le Comte, when you discharged Monsieur Gaubertin he had to look about him for a livelihood, for he was not rich—"

"Not rich! when he was plundering me at the rate of twenty thousand francs a year!"

"Monsieur le Comte, I am not attempting to justify him," Sibilet continued. "I would be glad to see Aigues prosper, were it only to demonstrate Gaubertin's rascality; but let us not deceive ourselves—we have as our enemy in him the most dangerous scamp there is in all Burgundy, and he is in a position where he can make trouble for you."

"How?" asked the general anxiously.

"At this day Gaubertin is at the head of a combination that supplies Paris with about one-third of all the wood it uses. As agent-general, commissioned to look after the interests of the wood trade, he directs all the operations in the forest, from the time the timber is felled until it is floated away in rafts. He is in constant relations with the workmen and controls the price of labor. It has taken him three years to create this position for himself, but he is intrenched in it as if it were a fortress. He is every man's man; he does not favor one merchant more than he does another; he has brought system and order into the business, and their transactions are made more advantageously and with less expense than when each of them had his own agent, as they used to have in the past. In this way, may it please you, he has succeeded so well in ridding himself of competition that he controls absolutely the public sales; the crown and the State are tributary to him. The crown and State timber, which has to be sold at auction to the highest bidder, belongs to Gaubertin's dealers by a sort of prescriptive right; no one to-day feels himself sufficiently strong to try to take it from them. Last year Monsieur Mariotte, of Auxerre, egged on by the superintendent of the public domain, did attempt to bid against Gaubertin; at first Gaubertin made him pay the usual price, what the wood was worth, but when it came to getting it out the laborers of Avonne demanded such fancy prices that Monsieur Mariotte was obliged to bring others from Auxerre, and the men of Ville-aux-Fayes thrashed them within an inch of their life. Indictments were found against those concerned in the proceedings, one for conspiracy and one for rioting. The trial cost Monsieur Mariotte a great deal of money; for, to say nothing of the odium he incurred by securing a verdict against penniless workingmen, he had to pay the costs, the defendants having nothing. And right here let me give you a maxim for your guidance, for you will have all the poor of this canton against you: never bring suit against the needy, for it is bound to insure you the hatred of all the poor in the vicinity. Bnt I have not finished my story. Figuring everything up, poor old Mariotte, a good, honest man, is still losing money on that purchase of his. Forced to pay spot cash for his wood, he sells it on time; Gaubertin, in order to ruin his rival, gives terms such as were never heard of: he sells his wood five per cent under cost; consequently Mariotte's credit, poor man, has had some rude shocks. Finally, Gaubertin is still following Mariotte up and hounding him so unmercifully that it is said he is going to leave, not Auxerre alone, but the department, and I think he is right in doing so. And in this way the landowners have long been sacrificed to the dealers, who make prices to suit themselves, just as at Paris the second-hand dealers secure their goods by collusion with the auctioneer. But Gaubertin saves the landowners so much expense and trouble that they are gainers, after all."

"In what way?" inquired the general.

"In the first place, the more a business is simplified the more profitable it eventually becomes to all concerned," Sibilet replied. "Then the proprietors have security that they will receive their returns when they are due, and that is a great point, as you will learn, in matters connected with agricultural enterprises. Finally, Gaubertin is the father of the laboringman; he pays him well and gives him steady work; consequently the woods of the dealers and such of the landlords as intrust their interests to Gaubertin—Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles, for instance—are never pillaged. The women go there and pick up the dead branches, nothing more."

"Gaubertin has made good use of his time, the infernal scoundrel!" exclaimed the general.

"He is a great man!" replied Sibilet. "As he says, instead of being steward of Aigues, he is régisseur of the fairest half of the department. He takes but a pinch from each, and that pinch, on a business

of two millions, brings him in forty or fifty thousand francs a year. 'The Parisian chimneys pay the whole!' he says. There is the enemy you have to fight with, Monsieur le Comte! And so, my advice to you would be to knock under and be friends with him. He is connected, as you are aware, with Soudry, the corporal of gendarmes at Soulanges, and with Monsieur Rigou, our mayor here at Blangy; the gardes champetres are his creatures; hence it will be impossible to put an end to the delinquencies that cause you such annoyance. Your woods have been going to ruin for some time past, for the last two years especially. It follows that the Messieurs Gravelot have a fair chance of winning their suit, for they say: 'By the terms of the lease you are to guard the woods at your expense; you do not guard them, and we are subjected to loss by your failure to comply with the terms of the contract; consequently, pay us damages.' That sounds specious enough, but it won't win them their suit necessarily."

"It will be best to fight the suit and have done with it, even if it does cost us something. So that we may be free from annoyance in the future," said the general.

"That will please Gaubertin," Sibilet replied.

"Why so?"

"Going to law with the Gravelots is the same thing as a conflict with Gaubertin, who is their representative; hence nothing will please him so well as this suit. He says so openly; he declares he will fight the case to the end, even if he has to carry it to the Court of Appeals."

"Oh, the villain!—the—the—"

"If you conclude to carry out your purpose and be your own factotum," Sibilet went on, turning the knife around in the wound. "You will find yourself at the tender mercies of the workingmen, who will treat you as they did poor Mariotte. Charging you extortionately for labor and placing you in a situation where you will have to sell at a loss. If you should try to secure a tenant you will find none, for you must not expect that any one will risk for a private person what Father Mariotte risked for the crown and the State. And then again, let the simpleton go and tell the administration of his losses if he will! The 'administration' is a gentleman very like your humble servant when he was in the land-office, a worthy man in a threadbare coat reading a newspaper behind a desk. You will not find him any softer-hearted when his pay is twelve thousand francs than when it is twelve hundred. Talk as you like of reductions, of reclamations on the treasury, as represented in the person of this gentleman! He will finish cutting his pen and his answer to you will be *turlututu*. You are outside the pale of the law, I tell you, Monsieur le Comte."

"What am I to do?" cried the general, whose blood was boiling in his veins, striding to and fro before the bench.

"Monsieur le Comte," was Sibilet's cruel answer, "what I am about to say is contrary to my own interests, but you must sell Aigues and leave the country!"

On hearing these words the general bounded as if he had been shot and gave Sibilet a penetrating look.

"A general of the Imperial Guard run away from a set of rascals such as they! and when the comtesse is fond of Aigues!" said he. "Sooner than do it I will give Gaubertin a blow on the public square of Ville-aux-Fayes, so that he may be compelled to fight me, and I may kill him like a dog."

"Monsieur le Comte, Gaubertin knows better than to be entrapped into a quarrel with you. And then it would never do to insult in public so important a personage as the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"I will have him dismissed; the Troisvilles will sustain me when my fortune is at stake."

"You cannot do it, Monsieur le Comte; there's no use trying. Gaubertin has long arms, and you will only make the situation worse than it is."

"And about the suit?" said the general. "We must think of the present."

"Monsieur le Comte, I can put you in the way of gaining it," Sibilet replied with an air of sagacity.

"Good boy, Sibilet!" said the general, shaking his steward warmly by the hand. "And how will you do it?"

"You will win in the Court of Appeals, in my opinion, on a legal technicality. I think that the Gravelots have a strong case, but it is not always sufficient to have the law and the facts on one's side; there are forms to be observed which the Gravelots have failed to comply with, and when forms and facts are opposed to each other, form always carries the day. The Gravelots should have made a formal demand on you to have the woods more strictly guarded. They have no right to come in at the expiration of their lease and ask damages for things that happened nine years ago; there is a clause in the lease that will sustain us in a demurrer on that point. You will lose at Ville-aux-Fayes, you may also lose in the next court the case is heard before, but you will win at Paris. The expert testimony will cost you a heavy sum, the costs will be ruinous; even if you come out ahead you will have to draw checks to the amount of twelve or fifteen thousand francs—but you will gain the suit if your mind is set on it. It won't help you any with the Gravelots, for it will be even more expensive for them than for you; you will be their *bête noire*, you will get the name of being quarrelsome, you will be slandered and calumniated—but you will win."

"What am I to do?" repeated the general, on whom Sibilet's arguments produced the effect of a violent irritant. As he called to mind the horse-whipping he had inflicted on Gaubertin he devoutly wished that it had been his own back instead that received the blows; his blazing face showed Sibilet the agony of torment he was in.

"What are you to do, Monsieur le Comte? Compromise the suit—it is the only thing to do. But you cannot appear in the matter yourself; you must let people think that I am robbing you. In our probity reside all our fortune and our peace of mind, poor devils of stewards that we are, and we cannot afford to be suspected of dishonesty; we are always judged by appearances. Gaubertin saved Mademoiselle Laguerre's life in his earlier days, and yet he had the reputation of plundering her right and left; she recompensed his silent devotion by leaving him a diamond worth ten thousand francs, and Madame Gaubertin carries it at this day set in the handle of her umbrella."

The general cast on Sibilet a second look as penetrating as the first, but the steward did not appear to notice the distrust that lay concealed beneath that guileless, smiling candor.

"Monsieur Gaubertin would be so delighted to find that I am a dishonest man," Sibilet went on, "that he would become my friend and protector, and should I make him some such proposition as this: 'I can get twenty thousand francs out of Monsieur le Comte for the Gravelots, provided they will go halves with me,' he would open both his ears to listen. If your adversaries agree to this I can bring you back ten thousand francs; you will only be out ten thousand, you save appearances, and that is the end of the business."

"You are a good fellow, Sibilet," said the general, taking his hand and warmly clasping it. "If you only do as well in the future as you are doing now I shall say you are the pearl of stewards."

"As for the future," the régisseur replied, "you will not starve if there is no wood cut for the next two or three years. Begin by guarding your forests more carefully. The Avonne won't run dry between now and then. Gaubertin may die; he may consider himself rich enough to retire; finally, you will have time to set up some one to compete with him in his business. The cake is big enough for two; look for another Gaubertin to fight Gaubertin."

"Sibilet," said the old soldier, delighted to see a way out of his difficulties, "if you can arrange the matter in the way you speak of I will give you a thousand crowns. As for the other matters, we'll think them over."

"Above all, Monsieur le Comte," said Sibilet, "put more keepers in your woods. Go and see for yourself what the peas-

ants have done to them during your two years' absence. What could I do? I am your steward; I am not a keeper. To protect the property you should have a head keeper, who should be mounted, and three men under him."

"We'll see to defending our interests. If there's to be war we'll fight. That don't scare me one bit," said Montcornet, rubbing his hands.

"It will be a war of money-bags," said Sibilet, "and of that kind of war you don't know so much as you do of the other. Men are killed, principles survive. You will find your enemy on the battlefield where every landlord has to fight it out, the field of *realization!* It is an easy enough matter to grow your products, the trouble lies in disposing of them, and in order to dispose of them it behooves you to be on good terms with every one."

"I shall have the people of the neighborhood on my side."

"How so?"

"By conferring benefits on them."

"Confer benefits on the peasants of the valley, on the shopkeepers of Soulanges!" said Sibilet, with an irony that flashed more brightly from one eye than from the other, causing him to squint most horribly. "Monsieur le Comte cannot be aware of the task he is proposing to himself. Our Saviour would die a second time on the cross were He to attempt it! If you value your peace of mind, monsieur, follow Mademoiselle Laguerre's example and submit silently to their thieveries—or else make the people fear you. The populace, like women and children, are governed best by terror. Therein lay the great secret of the Convention, and of the emperor."

"Oh, come! this is not the forest of Bondy!" exclaimed Montcornet.

"My dear," said Adeline, coming up and addressing Sibilet, "your breakfast is ready— Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte, but he has had nothing to eat since morning, and has been to Ronquerolles to deliver a load of grain."

"Be off with you, Sibilet," said the comte.

The next morning, the ex-cuirassier got up before it was fairly light and came back by way of the Porte d'Avonne with the intention of having a talk with his solitary keeper and finding what his opinion of matters was.

There was a portion of the forest, some thousand acres in extent, that skirted the Avonne, and not to deprive the landscape of any of its picturesque beauty, a row of majestic old trees had been left on either bank of the stream, which here stretched away for a distance of three leagues, straight almost as a canal. The mistress of Henri IV., to whom Aigues once belonged, and who was as passionately fond of the chase as the Béarnais himself, had caused a high, single-arched bridge to be built in 1593 in order to afford a passage from this portion of the forest to the much larger tract that was purchased at her request and was situated on the montain side. The Porte d'Avonne was built at that time to serve the purpose of a hunting lodge, and every one knows what taste and magnificence the architects lavished on these buildings that were devoted to what was then the chief amusement of the nobility and royalty. From this central point six broad avenues started, their junction forming a crescent. In the center of this crescent rose an obelisk bearing on its summit a golden sun, which bore on one side the arms of Navarre, and on the other those of the Comtesse de Moret. There was a second crescent laid out on the bank of the Avonne and communicating with the other by means of a straight avenue, at the further end of which a glimpse might be obtained of the bridge, which, by its graceful curves, reminded one of Venice. Between two handsome iron railings, similar in design to the railing, now unfortunately destroyed, that used to inclose the garden of the Place Royale at Paris, rose a brick pavilion, with courses of stone cut, like those of the chateau, in lozenge-shaped points, with a very high-pitched roof and windows whose lintels of stone were cut in a similar fashion. This antiquated style, which gave the pavilion an imposingly noble air, is in

cities suited only to the buildings of a jail, but here it mated well with the somber surrounding of the forest. A belt of trees formed a screen, behind which the kennels, an ancient falconry, a pheasant-house and the cabins of the whippers-in, once the wonder and delight of Burgundy, were now mouldering away in ruin.

From this magnificent pavilion there started forth in 1595 a royal hunting party; it was preceded by those noble hounds that Paul Veronese and Rubens so loved to paint, the spirited horses, now to be seen only in the canvases of Wouvermans, pranced and neighed as if proud of their fat, rounded croups that shone with a blue-white satiny sheen, while bringing up the rear were valets in gorgeous livery and the jack-booted, yellow-breeched huntsmen that fill the scene in Van der Meulen's pictures. The date commemorating the Béarnais's visit and the hunting party in honor of the fair Comtesse de Moret was carved in the stone of the obelisk under the royal arms. The jealous leman, whose son was subsequently legitimated, would not allow the arms of France, reminder of her shame, to appear beside those of her royal lover.

As the general stood and gazed on this venerable monument its roof was green with corroding moss, the elaborately carved stone work, gnawed by the unrelenting tooth of time, seemed to cry out from a thousand mouths against the profanation. In many places the panes had fallen from the leaden settings of the casements, giving the hoary pile the appearance of a one-eyed giant. Yellow gilliflowers grew among the balustrades, the ivy with its white, hairy fingers explored each nook and cranny. Everything was going to ruin, and told that the occupant possessed no taste, no reverence for the glories of the past. Two of the windows on the first floor had been broken out and the vacant spaces filled with hay. Through a window of the rez-de-chassée farming implements and fagots might be seen piled in the room within, while from another a cow's muzzle was protruded, informing visitors that Courtecuisse, to save himself the trouble of a journey to the offices, had converted the great banqueting hall of the pavilion—a stately room with lofty, ornamented ceiling, in the panels of which were depicted the arms of the owners of Aigues from the earliest times—into a cow-shed. The approaches to the structure were disfigured by grimy, filthy palings, forming inclosures where hogs were wallowing beneath roofs of decaying boards, where fowls were pecking and ducks swimming in green stagnant puddles; the manure was carted away at half-yearly intervals. Ragged garments were hung out to dry on the weeds and brambles which grew in unchecked profusion.

As the general came up by the avenue that led to the bridge Courtecuisse's wife was washing a saucepan, in which she had been boiling her matutinal coffee. The keeper was seated on a chair in the sunshine, watching his wife as a wild Indian might watch his squaw. Hearing the tramp of a horse he looked around, recognized his master, and arose with a hang-dog look.

"Well, Courtecuisse, my lad," the general said, "it no longer surprises me that the peasants cut my wood instead of the Gravelots: you seem to have easy times of it here?"

"Faith, Monsieur le Comte, I have spent so many nights in your damp woods that I have caught the rheumatism. I am so bad this morning that my wife has been making me a poultice; she is just washing out the saucepan."

"It appears to me that a man must be more hungry than ill to require a poultice of coffee," said the general. "See here, rascal, I went through my woods yesterday, and afterward through those of Messieurs de Soulanges and Ronquerolles. Theirs are well-guarded, while mine are in a shameful condition."

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte, they are old-timers in the country, they are; people respect their property. How do you think I can contend against six communes! I value my life more than your woods. A man who should attempt to

watch your woods as they ought to be watched would get a bullet in his head for his pains."

"You cowardly hound!" shouted the general; then, repressing the wrath that Courtecuisse's impudent answer aroused in him. "The weather was magnificent last night, but it will cost me a hundred crowns in the present and a thousand francs in the future for damages. You will have to leave your snug berth, my lad, unless there is a change. But there is mercy for the repentant sinner. Here is what I am going to propose to you: you shall have all the penalties and in addition three francs for every arrest you make. If I am not a gainer neither will you be, and you will get no pension, while if you do your duty and put down this pilfering you shall have a pension of a hundred crowns a year for life. Think it over and make your choice. Here are six roads," said he, pointing with his whip to the six convergent avenues, "you can use but one of them, as was the case with me, who did not fear the bullets. Try to choose the right one."

Courtecuisse, a little stumpy man of forty-six, with a round red face like the moon at full, was very fond of his ease; it was his hope and expectation to live and die in this pavilion, that was become *his* pavilion. The forest afforded grazing for his two cows, he had all the wood he needed, he spent his time cultivating his little garden instead of chasing up the evil-doers. This method of doing business suited Gaubertin, and Courtecuisse could read Gaubertin like a book, so the keeper only followed up the depredators when it suited him to do so, in order to satisfy some petty private grudge. He might hound a girl who rejected his advances, or some one whom he did not like, but he had long ceased to hate, beloved as he was by every one for his compliant, yielding disposition. There was always a place for Courtecuisse at the table of the Grand-I-vert, the fagoters all treated him with deference, he and his wife received gifts in kind from the plunderers. They brought in his wood from the forest for him, they trimmed his vines; in every one of his delinquents he had a servant.

Comforted as to his future by what Gaubertin had said to him, and counting on receiving his little plot of ground when the estate should be sold, he was abruptly awakened from his pleasant dream by the business-like proposition of the general, who was at last, after four years, showing himself in his true colors as a master determined to be hoodwinked no longer. Courtecuisse took from their pegs his cap, game-bag and musket, put on his leggings and the belt on whose plate were engraved the fire-new Montcornet arms, and loitered off in the direction of Ville-aux-Fayes at that slouching gait which the rustic assumes when he is revolving some deep project in his mind, staring vacantly into the woods meanwhile, and whistling to his dogs.

"You complain of your kind, generous master," said Gaubertin to Courtecuisse, "and you have only to reach out your hand and gather in a fortune! What, does the idiot offer you three francs for every arrest you make and the penalties! You have only to come to an understanding with your friends to make arrests enough to satisfy the old fool—dozens of them, hundreds of them, if he wants! With a thousand francs in hand, there is nothing to prevent you from buying the Bâchelerie from Rigou; you will be a bourgeois, will work for yourself, or rather will make others work for you, and will take your ease in a house of your own. But mind this: be sure and arrest no one but persons without means. One gets no wool from a sheep that has been shorn. Close with your master's offer, and let him have the costs to pay if he is eager. Tastes vary. There is old Mariotte; didn't he prefer to make losses rather than gains, in spite of all I told him?"

Courtecuisse, whose admiration for Gaubertin knew no bounds, went back home itching with a desire to be a bourgeois and property owner, like the rest of them.

General de Montcornet related the result of his expedition to Sibilet.

"Monsieur le Comte acted wisely," replied the steward, rubbing his hands, "but it won't do to stop half way. The garde-champetre, who suffers our fields and orchards to be laid waste, should be removed. Monsieur might easily get himself elected mayor of the commune, and take on an old soldier who would not be afraid to execute his orders in place of Vaudoyer. Surely a great proprietor should be master on his own estate. Just see the trouble we are having with our present mayor!"

The mayor of the commune of Blangy, Rigou by name, an unfrocked Benedictine monk, had married, in the year I. of the Republic, the maid-of-all-work of the old curé of the place. Notwithstanding the holy horror with which the prefecture regarded a married monk, he had retained his office since 1815, for there was no one else in Blangy capable of filling the position. But in 1817, when the bishop sent the Abbé Brossette to officiate in the parish of Blangy, which had not had the advantages of spiritual instruction for five-and-twenty years, violent dissensions, as was only to be expected, at once arose between the renegade and the young priest, of whom we have heard something already.

The magistrate, who had until then been regarded with contempt, gained popularity from the war which now broke out between the mairie and the parsonage. Rigou, whom the peasants had detested for his usurious practices, suddenly came to the front as the representative of their political and financial interests, which agitators declared were imperiled by the Restoration, and more still by the clergy.

The "Constitutionnel," prop and chief organ of the liberal party, after making its round from the Café de la Paix to the houses of the various functionaries, usually reached Rigou on the seventh day after its arrival in the town, for the subscription, though taken in the name of Père Socquard, the proprieter of the café, was paid for by twenty persons. Rigou would hand the sheet over to Langlumé, the miller, who cut it into strips which he distributed among those who had mastered the art of reading. It was to the *premiers-Paris* and irreverent distortion of the news of the great liberal journal, therefore, that the public of the valley looked for its instruction. In this way Rigou became a hero, much as did the *venerable* Abbé Grégoire. For him, as for certain bankers of Paris, politics veiled disgraceful peculations under the purple haze of popularity.

In those days this perjured monk, like the great orator Francois Keller, was looked up to as a defender of the rights of the people, he who but a short time before would not have dared to walk abroad after nightfall for fear lest he might stumble into some ditch in the fields and meet his death there, accidentally. To persecute a man politically is not only to aggrandize him, but also to pardon all his past. The liberal party wrought many miracles in this respect. Its mischievous journal, which managed in those days to make itself as dull, as slanderous, as credulous, as stupidly untruthful, as the masses to whose dangerous tendencies it pandered, has done as much harm, if that be possible, to private interests as to the Church.

Rigou had flattered himself with the hope that in a disgraced Bonapartist general, a child of the people whom the Revolution had raised to power, he would find an enemy to the Bourbons and the priests; but the general, acting on the counsel of his unavowed ambition, managed matters so as to avoid Monsieur and Madame Rigou's visit during his first sojourn at Aigues. When the reader shall have seen more of the terrible Rigou, the lynx of the valley, he will understand more fully the extent of the second great fault into which the general's aristocratic tendencies led him, and will see how the comtesse made matters worse by an impertinence that will find its proper place in this narrative.

If Montcornet had only taken pains to win over the mayor, if he had made advances, it is more than probable that the renegade's influence might have neutralized that of Gaubertin. So far from doing

that, there were three suits now pending before the tribunal of Ville-aux-Fayes, between the general and the ex-monk, one of which had already been decided in favor of Rigou. Until now Montcornet had been so wrapped up in his vanity, his marriage had so occupied his attention, that he had quite forgotten the existence of the mayor; but Sibilet had no more than given him the advice to take possession of Rigou's office, than he called for post horses and hurried off to pay a visit to the préfet.

The préfet, Comte Martial de la Roche-Hugon, had been the general's bosom friend since 1804; it was a word whispered in Montcornet's ear by the then minister, in a conversation that took place at Paris, that determined the former to purchase the Aigues property. The Comte Martial, who had been préfet under Napoleon and was préfet still under the Bourbons, flattered the bishop in order to keep himself in place. Now, as it happened, monseigneur had several times requested Rigou's removal. Martial, who was well acquainted with the affairs of the commune, was highly pleased with the petition of the general, who received his appointment within the month.

There was nothing strange in the circumstance that the general, during his stay at the prefecture, where his friend gave him a bed, should make the acquaintance of a non-commissioned officer in the old Imperial Guard who was having trouble in securing his pension. The general had previously had an opportunity of befriending this brave man, whose name was Groison; he was entirely penniless. Montcornet promised Groison to secure his pension for him, and offered him the position of garde-champetre at Blangy, where he might pay his debt of gratitude by protecting his, the general's, interests. The new mayor and the new garde-champetre assumed their offices simultaneously, and, as may be imagined, the chief's instructions to his subordinate were precise and explicit.

Vaudoyer, the dismissed garde, a peasant of Ronquerolles, like most gardes-champetres, was good for nothing but to dawdle about pot-houses, tell silly stories, and let himself be flattered by the poor, who are never better pleased than when they have a chance to corrupt this subaltern authority, the outer bulwark of property. He was acquainted with the corporal at Soulanges, for corporals of gendarmes, performing as they do semi-judicial functions in the preparation of criminal cases for the court, are brought into close contact with the gardes-champetres, their natural spies. Soudry sent Vaudoyer to Gaubertin, who received his former acquaintance hospitably and gave him something to wet his whistle with, listening attentively meanwhile to the other's tale of woe.

"My dear fellow," said the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, who had a different language for every one, "the thing that has happened you is what we must all look forward to. The nobles have come back, and the men ennobled by Napoleon are making common cause with them; what they all have in view is to crush the people, re-establish old laws and customs, and rob us of our property; but we are Burgundians, we must defend our rights, we must drive the *Arminacs* back to their holes in Paris. Go back to Blangy; you shall have a place under Monsieur Polissard, who has the contract for the Ronquerolles timber. Go, my lad; I will see that you have steady work the year through. But bear this in mind: the people who own that wood are friends of ours; there is to be no thieving there, else the fat will all be in the fire. Let the fagoters go to Aigues to do their stealing, and if you come across a purchaser send him to our people and not to Aigues. You will have your old place again, for this won't last; the general will soon sicken of living among thieves. Do you know that the old ruffian called *me* a thief—me, the son of the purest, the most upright of republicans; me, the son-in-law of Mouchon, the famous representative of the people, who had not enough to give him decent burial when he died!"

The general raised the pay of his garde-champetre to three hundred francs, and

built a new mairie, in which he gave him free quarters; the next thing he did was to secure a wife for his henchman, in the person of the orphan daughter of one of his tenants, who had left the girl three or four acres of vineyard. Groison's attachment to the general was that of a dog to his master; the entire commune respected him for his fidelity. The garde-champetre was feared, but as a ship-captain is feared by a crew whose love he has not; the peasants shunned him as a scabby sheep is shunned by the flock. He was greeted with gloomy silence, or else with jeers and raillery, cloaked by an affectation of careless jollity. He was a spy watched by other spies. He was powerless against numbers. The evil-doers took pleasure in hatching mischief that could be traced to no one, and the old mustache fretted and fumed at his impotency. Groison found in his duties the attraction of a war of partisans, and the pleasures of the chase where thieves and robbers were the quarry. His warlike experience had taught him that loyalty which consists in playing an honest game, and so this enemy to all underhand dealing conceived a violent hatred for those peasants who plotted so perfidiously, stole so adroitly, and wounded him in his self-love. He was not long in perceiving that the other estates were respected; the pilferings were confined strictly to the Aigues property; he therefore despised and hated those peasants who were so ungrateful as to plunder an old general of the empire, a man who was by nature generous and kind-hearted. But it was all in vain that he flew from place to place; he could not be everywhere at once, and his foes were legion. Groison demonstrated to his general the necessity of putting his forces on a war footing, making clear to him how little his own devotion could accomplish and the evil dispositions that prevailed among the inhabitants of the valley.

"There is something under all this, general," he said. "These people are too bold; they fear nothing; they seem to have enlisted the good God on their side!"

"We shall see," replied the general.

Fatal word! For the true statesman the verb *to see* has no future.

At this time Montcornet had to solve a question that seemed to him particularly urgent; namely, to find an *alter ego* to take his place at the mairie while he was away at Paris. He had to have a man who knew how to read and write, and in the entire commune Langlumé, who was his tenant at the mill, was the only one who fulfilled these conditions. The selection was as bad as bad could be. Not only were the interests of the general who was mayor, and the miller who was adjunct diametrically opposed to each other, but Langlumé had business relations of an extremely shady character with Rigou, who loaned him the funds he required in his business or in speculation. The miller was accustomed to buy the grass cut from the lawns of the chateau to feed to his horses, and had laid his pipes in such a way that Sibilet could find no other purchaser. The product of all the meadows of the commune was disposed of at a fair price before that of Aigues, and that of Aigues, although of better quality, being left until the last, had to go for what it would fetch. So Langlumé was temporary adjunct; but in France the temporary is the eternal, though some folks *do* say that the French are changeable. Langlumé, acting on Rigou's advice, affected to treat the general with the greatest consideration, and so, by the sovereign will of the historian, he found himself occupying the adjunct's chair at the moment when this drama opens.

In the absence of the mayor Rigou, who was *de facto* a member of the communal council, ruled there unchallenged, and put through various measures that were contrary to the general's interests. Sometimes he would cause to be voted an expenditure that benefited no one but the peasantry, and of which the burden fell chiefly on Aigues, which, by reason of its extent, paid two-thirds of the taxes; again he would refuse his consent to necessary appropriations, such as an increase of the abbe's salary, the repairing

of the parsonage, or the wages (*sic*) of a schoolmaster.

"What would become of *us* if the peasants knew how to read and write?" Langlumé said ingenuously to the general, by way of justifying this certainly not very liberal proceeding against a brother of the Christian Doctrine whom Abbé Brossette had endeavored to bring to Blangy.

On his return to Paris the general, highly pleased with his old Groison, set about hunting up some old soldiers of the Imperial Guard with whom to raise his army for the defense of Aigues to a standard of efficiency. After a good deal of running here and there, and of pestering with questions his friends and sundry half-pay officers, he at last lighted on one Michaud, formerly quartermaster's sergeant in the cuirassiers of the Guard, one of those men who are known in camp-fire language as *durs à cuire*, a name that had its origin in some garrison kitchen, where it is no unusual thing for the beans to prove refractory in the boiling. From his numerous acquaintance Michaud selected three men worthy to be his assistants, and who gave promise of making keepers "without fear and without reproach." The first, whose name was Steingel, was an Alsatian of unmixed blood; he was natural son to the general of the same name, who met his fate early in Napoleon's career, at the beginning of the campaign of Italy. He was tall and vigorous, of that breed of soldiers that, like the Russians, is accustomed to obey passively and unconditionally. Nothing could stop him in the execution of his duty; he would have taken an emperor or a pope and thrown him coolly out at window had such been the command of his superior. Danger was a thing of which he knew not the name. Intrepid among the daring legionaries, he had never received a scratch during his sixteen years of soldiering. It made not a particle of difference to him whether he slept on the ground or between sheets; when things were a little rougher than usual all he would say was: "It appears that's the way it is to-day!"

The second recruit, Vatel, was a soldier's son and corporal of voltigeurs; he had the gayety of the lark, but was rather too unprincipled where the fair sex was concerned, and was utterly destitute of all sense of religion; he was brave to rashness, and would have done his duty with a laugh if ordered out to shoot his best friend. Futureless, not knowing where to turn, he saw in the duties that were enjoined on him the promise of a mimic war that might prove interesting, and as the Grand Army and Napoleon stood him in stead of religion, he swore a great oath to stand by the brave Montcornet through thick and thin. His was one of those disputatious natures to which life without enemies seems dull and colorless—the nature of the lawyer or the policeman. Had it not been for the presence of the bailiff he would have seized old Tonsard and her bundle of fagots right in the middle of the tap-room of the Grand-I-vert, regardless of the principle that a man's house is his castle.

The third man, Gaillard by name, belonged to the plodding, laborious class of soldiers; he had been cut to pieces with musket-balls and saber-cuts and had retired from the service with the rank of sous-lieutenant. When he thought of the emperor's fate all else seemed as nothing to him; but his supreme indifference to everything carried him to as great lengths as Vatel's fiery nature carried *him*. With a natural daughter looking to him for support, he saw in the position that was offered him a means of livelihood, and accepted it as he would have taken service in a regiment.

The general went down to Aigues in advance of his recruits in order to discharge Courtecuisse before their arrival, and on reaching home he was almost paralyzed by his keeper's audacious insolence. There is much of the ridiculous in all the affairs of man, but Courtecuisse had overstepped the limit.

One hundred and twenty-six complaints had been entered against delinquents, most of whom were accomplices of Courtecuisse, and referred to the justice's court sitting at Soulanges, and of this number

sixty-nine had resulted in judgment for the plaintiff. Brunet, delighted with such a windfall, had made haste to take out the necessary papers to obtain what is styled, in legal parlance, *procès-verbaux de carence*, a miserable expedient where the power of justice ceases. It is a proceeding by which the sheriff's officer makes return that the judgment debtor has nothing, is absolutely a pauper. It is clear that where there is nothing to take nothing can be obtained, and the creditor, even if he be the king, must go unsatisfied. These paupers, selected with discernment, lived in the five adjoining communes, whither the sheriff's officer betook himself, duly supported and aided by his faithful myrmidons, Vermichel and Fourchon. Monsieur Brunet had forwarded all the judgments to Sibilet, accompanied by a bill of charges amounting to five thousand francs, requesting him to ask the Comte de Montcornet for further instructions.

At the very moment when Sibilet, with this great mass of papers ready to his hand, was tranquilly explaining to his employer what had been the outcome of the orders, too innocently and unreflectingly given to Courtecuisse, and was composedly watching one of the most violent tantrums that ever French general of cavalry gave way to, Courtecuisse himself appeared upon the scene, his object being to pay his duty to his master, and make a demand on him for eleven hundred francs or thereabouts, that being the sum to which the promised emoluments amounted. Thereon the true nature of the man asserted itself, and the general lost his head; rank, title, dignity were thrown to the winds; he was once more the trooper and rough-rider, and vomited foul language, of which later he could not help but be ashamed.

"Eleven hundred francs, indeed!" he roared. "Eleven hundred thousand cuffs on your ear, eleven hundred thousand kicks in your—! Do you suppose I don't know what's what? Get out of here, or I'll smash you flat!"

The general's face was fairly blue with rage; Courtecuisse, beholding it, took to his heels and was off like a shot.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Sibilet, very gently, "you are making a mistake."

"I—making a mistake?"

"For Heaven's sake, Monsieur le Comte, be careful; that rascal will have you up before the court."

"What do I care? Go and see that the scoundrel leaves the place this very instant; keep an eye on him to see that he doesn't carry off some of my property—and settle with him for what I owe him."

Four hours later the entire neighborhood was agape, gossiping and gabbling after its manner over this pretty scene. The general had almost murdered poor Courtecuisse, people said; he refused to pay him what was coming to him; he was trying to cheat him out of two thousand francs. Reports of the wildest character began to circulate in relation to the master of Aigues; it was affirmed that he was violently insane. The following day, Brunet, who had served so many papers for the general's account, placed in his hands, for Courtecuisse's, a summons to appear before the justice's court. A thousand flies were hovering around the lion ready to sting; his torment was only beginning.

The installation of a keeper is attended with certain formalities; he has to go before the court and be sworn. Some days elapsed, therefore, before the three new men bloomed out as servants of the public. Although the general had written to Michaud to come on at once and not wait until the pavilion of the Porte d'Avonne was made ready to receive him, the future head keeper was detained by preparations for his marriage, and could not get away for two weeks.

During this time, and pending the accomplishment of the legal formalities, which the authorities at Ville-aux-Fayes seemed to make it their business to hinder and delay as much as possible, the woods of Aigues were laid waste by the plunderers, who made the most of the opportunity afforded them by the unguarded condition of the property.

It was a great day in the valley, from Conches even to Ville-aux-Fayes, when the three keepers came out in all the bravery of their brand-new livery, green, like the emperor's, for they were well set-up men, with faces that showed they were not to be trifled with, firm on their legs, active and alert, and looking as if they were not to be scared by the prospect of a night in the forest.

Groison was the only man in the entire canton who turned out to welcome the veterans. Highly pleased to be thus re-enforced, he let slip some threats against the robbers, who would presently find themselves close-pressed and deprived of their opportunities for mischief. War was declared with the usual formalities, you see, by proclamation both open and secret.

Sibilet represented to the general that the gendarmerie at Soulanges, and particularly their corporal, were covertly hostile to the Aigues interest; he pointed out to him how desirable it was to have a force animated by a more friendly feeling.

"With a reliable corporal and men devoted to your interest you would have the district under your thumb," said he.

The general took post-horses once again and hurried off to the prefecture, where he succeeded in persuading the general commanding the division to retire Soudry and replace him by a man named Viallet, an excellent gendarme from the county-seat, of whom the general and the préfet spoke most highly. The gendarmes of the Soulanges company were dispersed by the colonel of the gendarmerie, an old friend of Montcornet's, among the other towns of the department; their successors were picked men, to whom the word was quietly passed that they were to keep a sharp lookout and see that the Comte de Montcornet's property received no damage in the future, and they were further enjoined not to let themselves be seduced by the blandishments of the people of Soulanges.

This last revolution, which was accomplished with a rapidity that allowed no time to thwart it, scattered astonishment and dismay through Ville-aux-Fayes and Soulanges. Soudry, who chose to consider himself dismissed, made a complaint, and Gaubertin found means to get him appointed mayor, a step that placed the gendarmerie under his command. There were loud outcries against Montcornet's tyranny, and he became the object of universal hatred. Not only had he taken the bread from the mouths of half a dozen families, but men were wounded in their vanity. The peasantry, aroused by the incendiary speeches of the small bourgeois of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, as well as by the words of Rigou, Langlumé and Monsieur Guerbet, postmaster of Conches, firmly believed they were on the verge of losing what they called their rights.

The general compromised the suit against his former keeper by paying him what he claimed.

For a consideration of two thousand francs Courtecuisse bought a little property that was land-locked, so to speak, within the domain of Aigues, having a single outlet that afforded passage to the game. Rigou had always refused to sell the Bâchelerie, but he now derived a malicious pleasure from letting Courtecuisse have it at a price far below its value in order to spite Montcornet. Courtecuisse thus became one of his numerous creatures, for he could at any time call on him for the balance of the purchase money, the ex-keeper having paid only a thousand francs down.

Michaud, the three keepers, and the garde-champetre henceforth led the lives of guerillas. Sleeping in the woods, scouring them constantly at every moment of the night and day, studying their issues, familiarizing themselves with the various species of timber and their location, accustoming their ears to the different sounds that break the silence of the forest, they soon became adepts in the woodman's art. They also contracted the habit of observing faces, making themselves acquainted with the different families that inhabited the villages of the canton and the individuals who composed them, investigating their morals and manners, their characters and means of livelihood.

This was not so easy a thing to do as one might imagine, for the peasants who got their living from Aigues met these intelligent measures either with dumb silence or simulated submissiveness.

From the very first Michaud and Sibilet were mutually antagonistic. The loyal and upright soldier, the honor of the non-commissioned officers of the Young Guard, could not endure the régisseur's sullen airs, his nature compounded of treacle and brutality, and dubbed him *the Chinaman*. He soon became aware that Sibilet was putting obstacles in the way of measures that were radically good, and was advocating others that were of doubtful utility. Instead of trying to mollify the general, Sibilet, as the reader may have discovered in the course of this narrative, was continually exciting him and egging him on to violent measures, while at the same time doing his best to break his spirit by a multitude of petty cares and annoyances, and by raising up for him a crop of difficulties that was renewed daily as regularly as the sun rose. While knowing nothing of the disloyal and disingenuous rôle adopted by Sibilet, who had promised himself from the start to serve either the general or Gaubertin as self-interest might seem to dictate, Michaud was satisfied that the steward's nature was a greedy, self-seeking, and thoroughly bad one; hence he could not see how he could be an honest man. The general was not displeased to see his two chief officers at variance. Michaud's enmity induced him to keep an eye on the régisseur, a species of espionage to which he would not have stooped if the general had required it of him. Sibilet attempted to win the head keeper to himself by caresses and flattery, but never succeeded in making him abandon the air of studied politeness that the honest soldier placed between them like a barrier.

These preliminary details having been made clear to the reader, he will now be in a position to understand what the general's enemies had in view, as well as the interest of the conversation he had with his two ministers.

IX.

ON MEDIOCRACY.

"WELL, Michaud, what is there new?" Asked the general, when the comtesse had left the dining-room.

"We won't talk business here, general, if you will let me have my way about it; walls have ears, and I want none but our own to receive what I have to say."

"Very well," replied the general. "Suppose we go and take a walk; if we follow the path through the meadows no one can hear us."

A few moments later the general was striding over the meadows accompanied by Sibilet and Michaud, while the comtesse, with Abbe Brossette and Blondet to right and left of her, took her way toward the Porte d'Avonne.

Michaud related the recent occurrences at the Grand-I-vert.

"Vatel was wrong," said Sibilet.

"They proved that by blinding him," replied Michaud; "but let it pass. You remember that we proposed to levy on the cattle of our judgment debtors, general. Well, that scheme has come to naught. Brunet—and his confrère Plissoud is just as bad as he—will never support us loyally; they will always find means to warn people of the projected levy. Vermichel, Brunet's assistant, was at the Grand-I-vert a while ago looking for Father Fourchon, and Marie Tonsard, Bonnebault's very good friend, has gone to Conches to spread the alarm. Finally, the depredations are beginning again."

"We must show our power; it is daily becoming more and more necessary," said Sibilet.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed the general. "We must insist that the judgments which carry with them imprisonment be enforced; if the parties won't pay their fines and the costs of court they must be locked up."

"Those people regard the law as a nullity and comfort one another by saying we dare not arrest them," Sibilet replied. "They think you are afraid! They must have accomplices at Ville-

aux-Fayes, for the procureur-royal seems to have pigeon-holed the papers."

"It is my opinion," said Michaud with a glance at the general's anxious face, "that by the use of money you can still save your property."

"It is better to spend money than resort to measures of severity," Sibilet rejoined.

"What do you propose?" asked Montcornet of his head keeper.

"My plan is very simple," said Michaud: "inclose your forest, just as you do your park; trespassing then becomes a criminal offense, punishable by the courts of assize."

"The material alone would cost nine francs the running fathom!" Sibilet sneeringly objected. "Monsieur le Comte would have to pay out over a third of all that Aigues is worth."

"Very well," said Montcornet, "I shall go and see the procureur-général; I will go at once."

"It is more than likely," Sibilet replied, "that the procureur-général is of the same mind as the procureur-royal, otherwise there would not be such negligence."

"That is what I must see about!" cried Montcornet. "The whole concern shall go by the board, judges, ministers, procureur-général and all; I will go to the garde des sceaux, and if necessary to the king."

At a sign made him by Michaud the general turned and said to Sibilet: "Adieu, my dear sir." The régisseur understood.

"Is it the wish of Monsieur le Comte, as mayor," the régisseur asked with a bow, "that the necessary steps should be taken to repress the abuse of gleaning? The harvest is at hand, and if the decrees regulating certificates of pauperism and forbidding paupers from the neighboring communes to glean on our land are to be published, there is no time to lose."

"Confer with Groison, and do it!" said the comte. "With such people to deal with," he added, "the law must be carried out to the very letter."

Thus, in a momentary fit of irritation, did the comte accede to a plan which Sibilet had been pressing on him for the last two weeks and to which he had refused his consent, until now, in the white heat of the anger inspired in him by Vatel's accident, he looked at it more favorably.

When Sibilet had taken himself off, the comte turned to his keeper and said in an undertone:

"Well, my dear Michaud, what is it?"

"You have an enemy in the camp, general, and you confide to him things that you should keep secret even from your nightcap."

"I share your suspicions, my dear friend," said Montcornet; "but I am not going to commit the same blunder twice. I am waiting for you to be thoroughly posted in the business of the stewardship; when that time comes, and when Vatel is capable of taking your place, I mean to get rid of Sibilet. But what have I to reproach the man with, after all? He is industrious, he is honest; I don't believe he has stolen five hundred francs in five years. He has the meanest disposition on the face of God's earth, but that's all there is against him. If he has any plan, what can it be?"

"I will find out what it is, general," said Michaud in a grave voice; "for he certainly has a plan, and, with your permission, I think a thousand francs would get it out of that old rascal Fourchon, although, since this morning, I have my suspicions that Father Fourchon would serve God and the devil with equal willingness. Their object is to force you to sell the estate; that rascally old cobbler told me so. Know this: from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes there is not a peasant, not a small bourgeois, not a farmer, not an innkeeper, who has not his money laid by in readiness against the day when the carcass shall be cut up and divided. Fourchon tells me that Tonsard, his son-in-law, has already signified the allotment he desires. The idea that you will have to sell your estate dwells in the air of the valley like a pestilential vapor. Perhaps the steward's pavilion and some of the surrounding land is what Sibilet expects as the price of his treachery. Not

a word is spoken between you and me that is not known at Ville-aux-Fayes almost as soon as it leaves our mouths. Sibilet is related to your enemy Gaubertin. What you let slip just now about the procureur-général will likely enough be reported to him before you can reach the prefecture. You don't know the people of this canton!"

"Don't know them, say you? They are the dregs of humanity, the lowest of the low! Ah!" cried the general, "I would rather a hundred times see Aigues in ashes than knuckle to such scoundrels!"

"We won't burn Aigues yet awhile; we'll see if we can't find some way of outwitting these pigmies. From the threats they utter there is reason to expect the worst. Speaking of fire, therefore, general, I would advise you to see that your farm buildings are covered by insurance."

"Oh, Michaud, do you know what they mean by calling me a Tapissier? As I was walking along the Thune yesterday, some urchins shouted at me, 'There goes the Tapissier!' and then they took to their heels."

"Sibilet could tell you; he would like nothing better, for it pleases him to see you in a passion," Michaud answered with an air of deep distress. "But as you ask me, Monsieur le Comte—well, it is the nickname those ruffians have given you."

"And on account of what?"

"Why, general, on account of—of your father."

"Ah, the blackguards!" cried the general, his face ashy white. "Yes, Michaud, my father was a cabinet-maker; the comtesse knows nothing—oh! may she never, never— But what matters it, after all? Have I not danced with queens and empresses? I will tell her all this very night," he said after a pause.

"They say you are a coward, too," Michaud continued.

"Ah!"

"They ask how it was you got off safe at Essling, where so many brave men lost their lives."

A smile was the only answer the general vouchsafed to this insinuation.

"Michaud, I am going to the city!" he exclaimed with a sort of fury, "if only to attend to taking out the insurance policies. Tell Madame la Comtesse where I am gone. They desire war; very well, they shall have it, and I, for my part, will do my best to make things hot for these bourgeois of Soulanges and their precious peasants. We are in the enemy's country, remember; be prudent. Caution the keepers to keep within the law. See that poor Vatel is well cared for. The comtesse is badly frightened; let her know nothing of the troubles, otherwise she will never come here again."

The general, and even Michaud himself, had no idea of the gravity of the impending peril. Michaud, a stranger to this part of Burgundy, underrated the enemy's resources, even when he saw them in action, and the general was a believer in the efficacious might and majesty of the law.

In the eyes of some twenty millions of human beings the Law, in France, is but a white paper nailed to the door of the church or of the mairie. Hence the word *papers* employed by Mouche to express his notion of supreme authority. There are cantonal mayors (we are not speaking now of the mayors of simple communes) who make bags to hold grapes or seeds from their copies of the "Bulletin des Lois." As for the communal mayors, were any one to specify the number of those who can neither read nor write, and the manner in which they keep their civil records, he would not be believed. The gravity of this situation, with which well-informed statesmen are perfectly familiar, will doubtless decrease with time; but the principle that centralization—against which people clamor so loudly, as in France they howl down everything that is for the public good—the principle that centralization will never touch, the force against which it will break eternally, is that which the general was about to encounter and for which we can find no better name than *mediocracy*.

In the past, curses loud and deep were

heaped on the tyranny of the nobles; at the present day the popular outcry is directed against the money-kings and the abuses of those in power, which, after all, are nothing more than the inevitable galling of the social yoke, called by Rousseau a contract, by this one a constitution, by that one a charter; here king, there czar, in Great Britain parliament; but the leveling-down process, begun in 1789 and continued in 1830, paved the way for the paltering supremacy of the bourgeoisie and delivered over to it France, bound hand and foot. A state of affairs that is, unfortunately, only too common at the present day, the subjection of a canton, a small town, a sous-prefecture, by a single family; such a state of affairs, in a word, as a Gaubertin was able to bring about at the height of the Restoration, will serve to show the extent of this social evil better than any mere dogmatic assertion can do. Many tyrannized localities will recognize the picture, many a man who accepted his fate and suffered in silence will here find that little public *ci-gît* which sometimes makes up in part for a great private calamity.

At the moment when the general was deluding himself with the notion that he was commencing afresh a war that had never ceased, his former steward had completed the meshes of the net in which he now held the entire arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. To avoid being tedious, it will be necessary to give a succinct account of the various genealogical ramifications by virtue of which Gaubertin enwrapped the whole district, like a gigantic boa winding itself about a tree so artfully that the wayfarer is deceived and takes it for an integral portion of the vegetable growth.

In 1793 there were living in the Avonne valley three brothers named Mouchon. It was in 1793 that the valley began to be called by the name of Avonne instead of Aigues, out of hatred for its old lords.

The senior of this family, who had been intendant to the house of Ronquerolles, was elected to the Convention as member for his department. Like his friend, the elder Gaubertin, the public prosecutor who assisted the Soulanges in their hour of peril, he saved the lives and property of the Ronquerolles. He had two daughters, one of whom married Gendrin, the lawyer, the other the younger Gaubertin; he died in 1804.

The second brother, through the influence of the deputy, obtained the postmastership at Conches without having to pay the customary tribute. He died in 1817, leaving as heir to all his wealth a daughter, married to a rich farmer of the neighborhood named Guerbet.

The remaining Mouchon, having embraced the religious calling, had been curé at Ville-aux-Fayes before the Revolution, was curé when the Catholic religion was restored, and still held the curacy of that small capital. He would not swear fealty to the Republic, and lived for a long time in hiding at Aigues, in the old manor-house, where he was secretly protected by the two Gaubertins, father and son. He had reached the age of seventy-seven years at the period of our story, and on account of the similarity between his character and disposition and those of the natives, he enjoyed their affection and esteem. Saving even to penuriousness, he had the reputation of being very rich, and this presumption of fortune did not detract from the consideration in which he was held. The bishop thought very highly of the Abbé Mouchon, who was always mentioned as the venerable curé of Ville-aux-Fayes; and a circumstance that, no less than his wealth, endeared Curé Mouchon to the townspeople was the positive knowledge that he had more than once declined to go and officiate in an aristocratic parish of the departmental capital, where monseigneur desired his presence.

At this time Gaubertin, mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, had a valuable supporter in Monsieur Gendrin, his brother-in-law and president of the tribunal of first instance. The younger Gaubertin, whose practice in the court exceeded that of any other lawyer, and whose name was famous throughout the arrondissement, was already talking of selling out his business, though he had pursued it but five years.

It was his desire to succeed his uncle Gendrin on the bench when the latter should retire. President Gendrin's only son was in charge of the office where deeds and mortgages were recorded.

Soudry's son, who for two years past had occupied the chief position in the public ministry, was a tool of Gaubertin's. Cunning Madame Soudry had not failed to fortify the position of her husband's son; she had married him to Rigou's only daughter. The united fortunes of the old monk and of Corporal Soudry, which must eventually fall to this young man, made him a person of great consequence in the department.

The sous-préfet of Ville-aux-Fayes, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, nephew to the secretary-general of one of the great departments of state, was the happy man who had been selected as the husband of Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin, the mayor's second daughter, whose dowry, like her elder sister's, was to be the neat sum of two hundred thousand francs, leaving expectations out of the question. The public servant unconsciously did a sensible thing when he fell in love with Mademoiselle Elisa, on his arrival at Ville-aux-Fayes, in the year 1819. Had it not been for his marriage prospects, he would long ago have been compelled to file his request for an exchange of posts; but now he was *in posse* one of the great Gaubertin connection, the head of which had his eye fixed on the uncle much more than on the nephew in this alliance. Consequently the uncle, in furtherance of the nephew's interests, threw all the influence he could dispose of in favor of Gaubertin.

And thus it was that the church, the magistracy in its twofold form, removable and irremovable, the municipality and the administration, constituting the four-footed animal called power, moved its four legs at bidding of the mayor.

Learn now how that supremacy had fortified itself above and below the sphere in which it acted:

The department in which Ville-aux-Fayes is situated is one of those whose population entitles them to six deputies. Ever since there had been a left-center in the Chamber, the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes had elected as its representative Leclercq, Gaubertin's son-in-law, member of the banking firm that handled the money of the wine trade, and who had recently been made a regent of the Bank of France. The number of electors sent by this fertile valley to the electoral college was always sufficiently large to insure the election of Monsieur de Ronquerolles, who was devoted to the interests of the Mouchon family. The electors of Ville-aux-Fayes accorded their support to the préfet, on condition of his retaining the Marquis de Ronquerolles in his seat. Gaubertin, therefore, who was the first to suggest this arrangement, was viewed with a very friendly eye at the prefecture, where he saved the authorities from many an unpleasant experience. The préfet was expected to see to it that three straight-out ministerialists and two left-centerists were returned. As the two last-named deputies were, one, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, brother-in-law to the Comte de Sérizy, and the other a regent of the Bank, they did not inspire the Cabinet with mortal terror. As long as this condition of affairs lasted, the Ministry of the Interior thought that the department conducted its elections very nicely.

The Comte de Soulanges, peer of France, with the expectancy of a marshal's baton, faithful to the Bourbons, knew that his domain was well administered and well guarded by Lupin the notary and by Soudry; he might well be considered a protector by Gendrin, whom he had successively made judge and president, aided, however, by Monsieur de Ronquerolles.

Messieurs Leclercq and de Ronquerolles, then, had their seats in the left-center, but nearer the left than the center, an obviously advantageous position for a man who regards his political conscience as a garment to be donned and doffed at will.

Monsieur Leclercq's brother had recently been appointed to a collectorship in Ville-aux-Fayes.

In addition to all this Leclercq, the banker and deputy, had lately purchased,

at no great distance from the little capital of the Vale d'Avonne, a magnificent property, embracing park and chateau, which brought him in thirty thousand francs yearly and secured his position in the canton.

Thus we see that in the higher regions of the State, in the two Chambers and in the most important ministry, Gaubertin could reckon on an influence that was equally powerful and active; and he had not yet teased it for trifles or wearied its patience with too many serious requests.

The counselor Gendrin, he who had been appointed president by the Chamber, was the grand factotum of the judiciary. The first president, who was one of the three ministerial deputies and had made himself indispensable as the mouthpiece of the center, left the business of his court to Gendrin to conduct for six months at a time. Finally, the counsel to the prefecture, a cousin of Sarcus, known as Sarcus the Rich, was the prèfet's mainstay and himself a member of the Chamber. Had it not been for the ties of family that united Gaubertin and young Du Lupeaulx, there would have been an intimation from the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes that a brother of Madame Sarcus was *desired* for sous-prèfet. Madame Sarcus, wife of the counsel, was a Vallat of Soulanges, a family that was connected with the Gaubertins; it was said that she had looked with favor on Lupin the notary when she was younger.

Although she was forty-five years old, and had a grown son who was an engineer, Lupin never visited the capital that he did not call to pay his respects or dine with her.

The nephew of Guerbet, the postmaster, whose father, as we have shown, was tax-gatherer at Soulanges, held the important position of juge d'instruction to the court at Ville-aux-Fayes. The third judge, son of Maître Corbinet the notary, was of course owned by the all-powerful mayor, body and soul; finally, young Vigor, son of the lieutenant of gendarmes, was the supplementary judge.

Sibilet's father, the original clerk of the court, had given his sister in marriage to Monsieur Vigor, the lieutenant of gendarmerie at Ville-aux-Fayes. This worthy man, who was father of six children, was cousin to Gaubertin's father by his wife, who was a Gaubertin-Vallat.

Some eighteen months previously to this time the united efforts of the two deputies, Monsieur de Soulanges and President Gaubertin, had succeeded in obtaining for old Sibilet's second son a situation as commissary of police.

Sibilet's oldest daughter had married Monsieur Hervé, a teacher, whose school had been transformed into a college by reason of this marriage, and for the last year Ville-aux-Fayes could boast of having a proviseur (something midway between a schoolmaster and a professor).

The Sibilet who was chief clerk to Maître Corbinet was only waiting for the sureties promised by Gaubertin, Soudry and Leclercq to step into his master's shoes.

The youngest son was employed in the offices of the public domain, and had the promise of succeeding the registrar, as soon as that functionary should reach the age of retirement.

And, finally, the youngest daughter, aged sixteen, was engaged to Captain Corbinet, brother of the notary, for whom a position had been obtained in the general post-office.

The posting privilege at Ville-aux-Fayes was in the hands of the elder Monsieur Vigor, the banker Leclercq's brother-in-law, and he was commander of the National Guard.

An old maid of the Gaubertin-Vallat branch, sister to the wife of the clerk of the court, kept a little shop where she had a monopoly of the sale of stamped paper.

Thus, turn whichever way you might in Ville-aux-Fayes, you were certain to fall up against some member of this invisible, intangible clique, whose chief, known and recognized as such by all, great and small, was Gaubertin, mayor of the town and agent for the combined wood-dealers!

Step down into the vale of Avonne and you still find Gaubertin exercising his potent sway. At Soulanges through Soudry, through Lupin, adjunct to the mayor and intendant for the property of Monsieur de Soulanges, with whom he was in constant communication; through Sarcus, the justice of the peace, through Guerbet the tax-collector, through Gourdon the doctor, who had married a Gendrin-Vatebled. He ruled Blangy by means of Rigou and Conches by the postmaster, who was lord and master of his commune. The influence that the ambitious mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes enjoyed in the rest of the arrondissement may be judged from the way he struck out his tentacles in the valley of the Avonne.

A good deal depended on the head of the Leclercq firm. The banker had given his assurance that Gaubertin should step in and take his place as soon as he, Leclercq, should secure the receiver-generalship of the department. Soudry was to be promoted from his procureurship to be advocate-general to the cour royale, and the wealthy juge d'instruction, Guerbet, was looking forward to a counselorship. These changes would carry with them advancement for the young and ambitious spirits of the town and be the means of obtaining for the clique still more friendships among needy families.

Gaubertin's influence was so great that the savings and secret hoards of the Rigous, the Soudrys, the Gendrins, the Guerbets, the Lupins, nay, even of Sarcus the Rich himself, were invested in accordance with his dictates. Ville-aux-Fayes placed the most implicit trust in its mayor. Gaubertin's capacity was no less vaunted than his probity, than his good-nature; he was devoted to his relatives, to his constituents, but then he expected a devotion fully as great from them in return. The municipal council fairly worshiped him. The department was unanimous in its reproach of Monsieur Mariotte of Auxerre for going counter to this exemplary man.

Unaware of their strength, no occasion having ever presented itself of showing it, the good bourgeois of Ville-aux-Fayes merely congratulated themselves on the fact that they had no outsiders among them, and therein they thought themselves excellent patriots. There was nothing, however, that escaped the notice of this keen-sighted tyranny, itself invisible, and which every one believed to be the chief glory of the place. As soon, therefore, as the liberal opposition declared war on the Bourbons of the elder branch Gaubertin, who, unknown to his wife, had been keeping a natural son at Paris whom he did not know what to do with, a young man who went by the name of Bournier, and having heard that the youth was proof-reader in a printing-office, made application for a newspaper license for Ville-aux-Fayes. The journal thus started was dubbed the "Courrier de l'Avonne;" it came out three times a week, and commenced by taking all the legal advertising away from the organ of the prefecture. This departmental sheet, which was favorable to the administration in its general scope, but championed the ideas of the left-center more particularly, and which became very valuable to the trading community of Burgundy by its accurate commercial and financial reports, was entirely devoted to the interests of the triumvirate composed of Gaubertin, Rigou and Soudry. Bournier, now master of a fine plant from which he was reaping substantial profits and with the mayor for backer, was paying court to the daughter of lawyer Maréchal. It seemed likely that a marriage would result.

The only stranger in the great Avonnaise happy family was the engineer-in-ordinary of the Department of Roads and Bridges; but application had been made for his removal in favor of Monsieur Sarcus, son of Sarcus the Rich, and there was a fair prospect that this one hole in the net would speedily be mended.

This formidable combination, which monopolized all trusts, both public and private, which was sucking the country dry, which had attached itself to authority as a *remora* clings to the bottom of a ship, escaped the most prying vision. General de Montcornet had no suspicion of its

existence. The prefecture rubbed its hands and chuckled over the prosperity of the arrondissement; and at the Ministry of the Interior, the bureaucrats were wont to say: "There is a model sous-prefecture; everything goes along on greased wheels! How happy we would be if all the arrondissements were like that one!" Family feeling and local pride were so interwoven there that, as is the case in many small towns, and even prefectures, an office-holder not to the manor born would have been driven from the arrondissement within the year.

Montcornet's friend, the Comte de la Roche-Hugon, had been turned out of office a short time before the general's last visit. This action threw the statesman into the arms of the liberal opposition, where he became a sort of fugleman to the left, which he deserted with much promptitude when offered an embassy. His successor, luckily for Montcornet, was a son-in-law of the Marquis de Troisville, the comtesse's uncle, the Comte de Castéran. The préfet received Montcornet like a relative and politely told him to make himself at home at the préfecture. When he had given audience to the general's complaints, the Comte de Castéran sent invitations to the bishop, the procureur-général, the colonel of gendarmerie, the counselor Sarcus, and the general commanding the division, for breakfast the following morning.

Baron Bourlac, the procureur-général, who gained so much celebrity by his connection with the La Chauterie and Rifaël trials, was one of those men who stand ready to serve any and every Government and who are highly valued by those in authority for their devotion to power, be it what it may. During his elevation, primarily to the fanatical zeal with which he served the emperor, he was indebted for the preservation of his judicial standing to his rigid inflexibility and the consciousness of his professional dignity that he carried with him into the performance of all his duties. The procureur-général, who in former days had been implacable in his pursuit of the fragments of the Chouannerie, displayed equal implacability in following up the Bonapartists; but advancing years and the storms of life had abraded the roughnesses of his character, and like many another who has been a "tough case," in his day, he was become charming in speech and manner.

The Comte de Montcornet explained the state of affairs, spoke of the apprehensions of his head keeper, and wound up by an allusion to the necessity of making examples and strengthening the hands of the landlords.

The public functionaries listened to him with great gravity, but confined their replies to commonplaces, as: "Of course, the law must make itself respected.—Your cause is that of every landed proprietor.—We will look into your case, but great caution is demanded under our present circumstances.—A monarchy should certainly be able to do more for the people than the people could do for itself, even if it were, as in 1793, sovereign.—The proletariat is suffering; we have duties toward it as much as toward you and your class."

The hard-hearted procureur-général assumed a paternal tone, and discoursed so seriously and feelingly on the situation of the lower classes that the Utopians of the future, could they have heard him, would have been convinced that our high-grade functionaries had mastered all the difficulties of the knotty problem that puzzle modern social scientists.

It is proper to state here that at this period of the Restoration bloody collisions occurred in several portions of the kingdom, owing to no other cause than the devastating of forests by the peasants and the so-called "rights" which they arrogantly claimed for themselves. Neither the ministry nor the court looked with favor on emeutes of this description, or on the blood that was shed in the various efforts, successful and unsuccessful, to repress them. While admitting the necessity of severe measures, Government frowned on executive officers when they put down the peasants, and dismissed them if they showed weakness. This being the case the préfets trimmed their sails so as

to get out of the deplorable business as best they could.

At the beginning of the conversation Sarcus the Rich had made a signal to the préfet and the procureur-général; Montcornet did not catch this signal, which determined the tenor of the interview. The procureur-général was fully posted on the situation in the Aigues valley through the medium of his subordinate, Soudry.

"I predict a terrible conflict," the king's procureur at Ville-aux-Fayes had said to his chief, to see whom he had come up to Paris expressly. "Our gendarmes will be killed without mercy, so my spies tell me. The trial will result unsatisfactorily. The jury won't find for us when it sees it will incur the hatred of the families of twenty or thirty defendants; it won't give us a verdict against those accused of murder; it won't accord the long sentence of imprisonment that we shall be forced to demand against the murderers' accomplices. Even if you address the court in person the most you will obtain will be a few years' seclusion for the most guilty. It is better to shut our eyes than to open them, when, by opening them we are sure to bring about a collision that will result in bloodshed and perhaps cost the Government six thousand francs in costs, to say nothing of the prisoners' maintenance at the galleys. It is too dear a price to pay for a victory that is certain to expose the weakness of justice to every eye."

Montcornet, too high-minded to suspect the existence of "Mediocracy" in his valley and the mischief it was doing, said nothing of Gaubertin, whose breath was kindling into life the smoldering coals that were to break out into new troubles. When the breakfast was concluded the procureur-général took the Comte de Montcornet by the arm and conducted him to the préfet's private office. On emerging from this conference the general wrote a letter to the comtesse, informing her that he was about to leave for Paris and would return in a week's time. The result of the measures recommended by Baron Bourlac will show how wise was his advice, and how, if Aigues was to escape the evil fate in store for it, it could only be by yielding implicit obedience to the policy secretly dictated by the magistrate to the Comte de Montcornet.

There are readers, those who devour books merely to be thrilled and interested, who will accuse the author of this work of spinning out his explanations unnecessarily; but it is only fair to remark that the historian of manners and morals is subjected to laws far more severe than those that guide the mere historian of facts. He is to give a semblance of probability to everything, even to the truth, while in the domain of history, properly so-called, the impossible is noted down and is justified simply for the reason that it did actually happen. The vicissitudes of social or private life spring from a multitude of small causes that depend on an infinity of conditions. The savant has to dig down into the bosom of the avalanche that has swept away villages in its course in order to show you the bits of stone, detached from the summit of the snowy mountain, which alone can reveal the secret of the formation of the Titanic mass. If a suicide were all there was in question in this tale, there are five hundred of them every year in Paris; the melodrama is so common as to be vulgar, and no one cares to hear any extended reasons for it; but who can ever be brought to believe that the suicide of property happened in these days when wealth is prized more highly than life? *De re vestrâ agitur*, said an old fable-monger; it is for those who possess something, anything, that this book is written.

Bear in mind that this conspiracy of a town and an entire canton against an old soldier, who, in spite of his reckless daring, had escaped the perils of a thousand battles, was not a solitary instance; there have been similar occurrences in more than one department where the victims had no other thought than to benefit their fellow-men. This condition is a constant menace to the man of genius, the statesman, the great agriculturist;

in a word, to every one endeavoring to introduce new methods.

This final explanation, which bears somewhat of a political character, will serve not only to present the personages of the drama in their true light, and give weight to circumstances that might otherwise appear trivial, but it will cast a vivid illumination upon the stage where all the social interests are the actors.

X.

A SAD YET HAPPY WOMAN.

As the general was seating himself in his carriage to go to the capital, the comtesse was nearing the Porte d'Avonne, where Michaud and his wife Olympe had installed their lares and penates some eighteen months before.

Any one seeing the pavilion now and remembering the description of it given in a previous chapter would have said it had been torn down and rebuilt. In the first place, the fallen bricks had been replaced and the joints whence the mortar had fallen out repointed. The green moss that disfigured the slates of the roof had been cleared away, and the white railings, relieved against the dark-blue background, restored something of its original cheerful aspect to the building. The man whose duty it was to attend to the alleys of the park had cleaned up the approaches and strewn them with a layer of white sand. The sills and lintels of the windows, the cornice, all the stonework, in fine, had been restored, so that the structure presented its pristine appearance of majesty and splendor. The poultry-yard, the stables for cows and horses, had been removed once more to their proper position in the rear of the premises, where they were masked by clumps of trees, and instead of disgusting the beholder by their repulsive accessories they charmed his ear by their cooings, cluckings, gentle murmurs and flapping of wings, which, mingling with the sound of the summer breeze rustling the forest leaves, constitutes one of the most delicious harmonies of nature. The place had something of the wildness of the forest and the trim elegance of an English park. All the surroundings of the pavilion presented an indescribably neat and attractive appearance, while the interior, under the care of a young and happy bride, wore a very different aspect from that it had shown only a short while before under the brutal rule of a Courtecuisse.

It was the time of year when the place appeared at its best, in all its natural glories. A few beds of flowers exhaled their perfume to mingle with the wild woodland odors. From some recently mown meadows round about the delicious smell of fresh-cut hay greeted the nostrils.

When the comtesse and her two friends reached the end of one of the winding paths that came out at the pavilion, they beheld Michaud's wife seated before her door, working on a child's layette. The woman's pose and occupation gave an added human interest to the landscape that made its charm complete, an interest and charm that were in real life so touching that certain painters have, mistakenly we think, attempted to transfer them to their canvas. They forget that the *spirit*, the inner meaning of a landscape, has a grandeur such that, when it is faithfully reproduced by them, it dwarfs and crushes man, while in nature there is never an incongruity between the scene and the personage who fills it. When Poussin, the French Raphaël, made the landscape subsidiary to the figures in his "Bergers d'Arcadie," he knew well that man is a trivial, miserable object when Nature is accorded her rightful place in a picture.

The picture was one full of simple and strong emotions: August in all its glory, the harvest waiting for the sickle. In it was found the realization of the dream of many a man, whose turbulent, inconstant life, a mixture of good and evil, has made him long for rest.

Let us tell in a few brief words the story of this couple. When Montcornet offered to Justin Michaud the keepership at Aigues, the latter did not respond with much warmth to the advances of

the famous cavalry officer, for he was thinking of re-enlisting; but while they were palavering and conducting the negotiations that finally landed him in the hôtel Montcornet he had a glimpse of madame's first maid. This young woman, who had been intrusted to the comtesse's care by some honest farmer in the neighborhood of Alençon, had hopes of being heiress to some twenty or thirty thousand francs at the death of certain of her relatives. Like many farmers who have married young and have parents living, the girl's father and mother were poor and unable to give their oldest daughter an education; they therefore placed her out at service with the comtesse. Madame de Montcornet had Mademoiselle Olympe Charel instructed in sewing and dressmaking, and did not compel her to take her meals with the other servants; she was rewarded for her kindness by one of those unswerving, unquestioning friendships that are such a comfort to Parisian ladies.

Olympe Charel was a pretty lass of Normandy, with golden reflections in her brown hair and a slight tendency to embonpoint, with a pair of bright eyes to illuminate her intelligent, pretty face and a nose verging on the genus pug, with a modest air despite her figure voluptuous as an Andalusian maid's; she had the various airs and graces that a young woman not raised by birth much above the level of the peasantry can acquire by such intimacy as a mistress may condescend to permit. She was becomingly attired, kept herself neat and decent, and her language was tolerably good. Michaud, therefore, was easily enslaved, the more so when he learned that the fair one would have quite a little fortune at some future day. What difficulties there were came from the comtesse, who could not endure the thought of parting with such a treasure; but on Montcornet's explaining to her how the land lay at Aigues, she withdrew her opposition, and the only obstacle in the way of an early marriage was the consent of the parents, which was readily obtained.

Michaud, following the good example given by his general, regarded his young wife as a superior being to whom he was to yield military obedience, without stopping to ask why or wherefore. In the quiet of his home and in his busy life outdoors he found those elements of content desired by soldiers on abandoning their profession: sufficient work to keep the body limber and in good condition, enough fatigue to give him healthful sleep by night. For all his well-known bravery, Michaud had never received a wound of any consequence, and consequently was free from those aches and pains that often make the old soldier so uncomfortable a companion; like all men of great physical strength he was even-tempered; therefore his wife loved him. Since their arrival at the pavilion the happy couple had been enjoying the delights of their honeymoon, blessed by the harmonies of nature and of the art whose creations surrounded them on every hand —a rare concatenation! Our surroundings are not always in accord with our mental state.

The scene they beheld before them was such a charming one that the comtesse motioned to Blondet and Abbé Brossette to stop, for they were in a position whence they could see pretty Dame Michaud without being seen by her.

"When I take my walks abroad I always come to this part of the park," said she. "The sight of the pavilion and its pair of turtle-doves gives me as much pleasure as the most magnificent landscape."

And she leaned significantly on Emile Blondet's arm as if to impart to him a sentiment too impalpable to be expressed in words, but which a woman will not fail to divine.

"I wish the comte would take me on at Aigues as porter or something!" Blondet laughingly replied. "Well, what ails you now?" he added, perceiving the expression of sadness his words had brought to the comtesse's face.

"Nothing."

Women always answer with that hypocritical: "Nothing," when they have

some notion in their head of more importance than usual.

"But we may be troubled with thoughts which to you men may seem frivolous, but which to us are very terrible," she added. "I, too, have a wish; I would I were in Olympe's place."

"God grant your wish!" said the Abbé Brossette, smiling to disguise the serious meaning that lay hidden in his words.

Madame de Montcornet was alarmed to perceive in Olympe's face and manner an expression of melancholy and apprehension. A woman can tell what is passing in another woman's mind merely by the way she sets her needle in the cloth at every stitch. It was a fact that the head keeper's wife, though she had on her back a becoming pink gown, and her brown locks were tastefully arranged on her pretty head, was not thinking of matters attuned to the splendor of her apparel, the beauty of the day, or the work she had in hand. The expression of profound anxiety on her smooth forehead, her unseeing gaze, now bent on the sanded path, now on the dark foliage of the forest, were the more striking that she knew not she was observed.

"And I was envying her lot! What can she have to sadden her?" said the comtesse to the curé.

"Can you explain, madame," rejoined the abbé in an undertone, "why it is that when man's happiness seems most complete he is always assailed by some vague presentiment of coming evil?"

"Curé," Blondet interjected with a smile, "you are trying to imitate the bishop with your oracles. '*Nothing is stolen, all is paid for*,' Napoleon used to say."

"Such a maxim, let fall from imperial lips, assumes proportions no less important than if it were the utterance of society," rejoined the abbé.

"Well, Olympe, my child, what is the matter?" said the comtesse, stepping forward toward her former attendant. "You seem thoughtful and sad. You and your husband have not been having a tiff, I hope?"

Dame Michaud rose, and in doing so her expression changed.

"Come, my child," said Emile Blondet in a fatherly tone, "tell me what it is that makes that pretty face so pensive; aren't we almost as well off here in our pavilion as the Comte d'Artois in the Tuileries? Haven't we the bravest soldier of the Young Guard for our husband, and isn't he the handsomest man in all the world, and doesn't he love us to distraction? Why one would take you for a nest of nightingales in a thicket of laurels! If I had only known what Montcornet intended doing for his head keeper, hanged if I wouldn't have thrown up my occupation as penny-a-liner and applied for the situation!"

"It is not a place that would suit a man of your talent, monsieur," Olympe replied, smiling on Blondet as if he were an old acquaintance.

"But what ails you, child?" said the comtesse.

"I am afraid, madame—"

"Afraid! and of what?" the comtesse sharply asked, who was reminded by the woman's words of Mouche and Fourchon.

"Are you afraid of the wolves?" asked Emile, making a sign to Dame Michaud of which she failed to catch the meaning.

"No, sir; but of the peasants. I was born in le Perche, where there are plenty of bad people, Heaven knows, but I think the people here are a great deal worse than they are there. I have no call to meddle with Michaud's affairs, and I don't; but he distrusts the peasants so that he goes armed, even in broad daylight, when he has to cross the forest. He tells his men to keep always on the lookout. Horrid-looking men come roaming around here, with faces on them that promise no good. I was up yonder by the spring the other day, where the little brook has its rise that flows into the park through an iron grating, about five hundred steps from here—you know the place, madame?—they call it the Silver Spring. Well, there were two women there washing clothes, just where the brook crosses the path that leads to Conches; they did not know that I was near. Our pavilion can be seen from there; one of the old

women pointed to it. 'Look!' says she. 'Just think of the money they have squandered on that fellow who has stepped into goodman Courtecuisse's shoes.' The other speaks up and says: 'Don't you suppose a man will be wanting good pay for tormenting poor folks the way he does?' 'He won't torment them much longer,' says the first old woman; 'the thing has got to end. We have a right to the wood, anyway; the mistress who is dead and gone always let us do up our fagots. That was thirty years ago, so it is an established custom.' 'Well, we'll see how things will be next winter,' the other went on. 'My old man has sworn by everything that's good and holy that all the gendarmes on the face of the earth sha'n't keep us from going to the wood; he says he'll go himself, and then let them look out for their precious skins.' '*Pardi*, we can't freeze to death, and we must have wood to bake our bread,' the first woman says. 'They want for nothing, the people down there. Michaud's huzzy of a wife will have all she wants, see if she don't!' And, oh! madame, they said the most dreadful things about me, about you, and about Monsieur le Comte. They wound up by saying that they would burn the farm-buildings first and then the chateau—"

"Nonsense!" said Emile, "that is merely old women's gabble. They have been robbing the general, and there is to be a stop put to it; naturally enough these people are angry. That's all there is to it. You must remember that the Government is always the strongest, even in Burgundy. A regiment of cavalry would be ordered down here in short order should there be serious trouble."

The curé made signs to Madame Michaud from behind the comtesse's back to be silent about her fears, which were doubtless an effect of that second sight which results from genuine passion. The soul, when occupied exclusively by one loved being, finally embraces the immaterial world which surrounds it and beholds in it the elements of the future. A woman experiences in her love the same presentiments which at a later period are lights to guide her in her maternity. Thence come those fits of melancholy, that unaccountable sadness, for which the sterner sex, engrossed in the daily struggle for existence, in their unceasing activities, can assign no reason. Every genuine love becomes for a woman an active introspection, more or less lucid, more or less profound, according to her nature.

"Come, child, show Monsieur Blondet your pavilion," said the comtesse, whose anxiety made her forget the Péchina, for whose sake too she had come.

The interior of the pavilion, now that it was put in repair, did no discredit to the splendor of the exterior. The architect who had been sent down from Paris with his mechanics, by taking which step the master of Aigues had given fresh cause of complaint to the men of Ville-aux-Fayes, had divided the rez-de-chaussée up into four apartments, which was the way it had been arranged originally. First came an antechamber, at the further end of which was an ancient balustraded winding staircase, and behind which was the kitchen; on one side of the antechamber was the dining-room, and on the other a drawing-room with ornamental ceiling and wainscoting of old oak, now black with age. The architect whom Madame de Montcornet had selected to superintend the repairs had given especial care to harmonizing the furniture of this apartment with its ancient decorations.

At this date, fashion had not as yet given a fictitious value to the débris of past centuries. The sturdy old fauteuils in carved walnut, the high-backed chairs upholstered in tapestry, the consoles, the mantel-clocks, the tall screens, the tables, the chandeliers that were to be found in the shops of the second-hand dealers in Ville-aux-Fayes and Auxerre, were fifty per cent cheaper than the trashy furniture made in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine; the architect, therefore, had simply bought a few loads of these antiquities, only using some discretion in selecting them, and these, supplemented by some things from the château that

had been put on the retired list, gave to the salon of the Porte d'Avonne quite an artistic appearance. As for the dining-room, he had the woodwork grained to represent oak, and covered the walls with a paper that was known as "Scotch," and Madame Michaud hung white muslin curtains with green borders at the windows, and introduced some mahogany chairs upholstered in green cloth, two enormous side-boards, and a mahogany table. A few pictures, chiefly battle pieces, served to light up the room, which was warmed by an earthen-ware stove, on either side of which fowling-pieces were hung against the wall. This inexpensive luxury had been given out up and down the length of the valley as the *non plus ultra* of Oriental magnificence, and, strange to say, had excited the covetousness of Gaubertin, who, while promising himself the pleasure of demolishing Aigues, reserved to himself *in petto* this gorgeous pavilion.

On the first floor the couple had three chambers at their disposal. Any one looking at the muslin curtains dependent from the windows could have told in a moment that they had been hung by some one who had fixed ideas as to what was the right and proper thing for a Parisian bourgeoise to have in her bedroom. Up here, where Dame Michaud's will was law, she had insisted on having a smooth, glossy paper. The furniture was of that common sort, of mahogany and tawdry Utrecht velvet, that one sees everywhere, and included an immense double, four-post bed, with a canopy whence the curtains of embroidered muslin descended in sweeping folds, while on the mantel-shelf was an alabaster clock, flanked on each side by candelabra carefully done up in gauze and kept in countenance by two vases of artificial flowers under their protecting shades of glass, the whole the wedding-present of the ex-cavalryman. Upstairs, in the garret, were the rooms of the cook, the man-servant and Péchina, which had all felt the effect of the recent restoration.

"Olympe, my girl, you are keeping something back," said the comtesse as she entered the state bedroom, leaving Emile and the curé outside, who went downstairs on hearing the door close.

Madame Michaud, who was tongue-tied, so to speak, by remembrance of Abbé Brossette's signals, to avoid speaking of her fears, which were livelier than she was willing to allow, disclosed a secret that reminded the comtesse of the object of her visit.

"I love Michaud with all my heart, madame, and you know I do; tell me, how would you like to know you had a rival by you, in your own house?"

"What do you mean, a rival?"

"Yes, ma'am; that little blackamoor you sent to me loves Michaud without knowing it, poor child! I did not know what to make of her conduct for a long time, but the last few days have enlightened me."

"And she only thirteen years old!"

"Yes, ma'am. And you will admit that it is not unreasonable for a woman who will be a mother in a few months to have her fears; but I didn't want to speak about them before those gentlemen, so I rattled away about trifles of no importance," the head keeper's wife generously said.

As a matter of fact, Madame Michaud was perfectly at ease so far as Geneviève Niseron was concerned, but for some days past she *had* fears, and most horrible ones, that the peasants had first inspired and then done their best to aggravate.

"And what have you seen?"

"Everything, and nothing," replied Olympe, looking the comtesse in the face. "The child moves like a snail when I tell her to do anything, while Justin has only to ask for a thing and she is off like an arrow. She trembles like a leaf when she hears my husband's voice, and her face is like that of a saint in heaven when she is looking at him; but she has not the least idea it is love, she is entirely ignorant of her passion."

"Poor child!" ejaculated the comtesse in a tone of supreme ingenuousness.

"And then Geneviève is sad when Justin is away from home," Dame Mi-

chaud continued, "and if I ask her for her thoughts she tells me she is afraid of Rigou—the silly thing! When Justin is tramping the woods at night the child is as anxious and restless as I am myself. If I open my window to listen for the sound of my husband's horse's hoofs I am sure to see a light burning in the chamber of la Péchina, as they call her, and I know she is watching and waiting; and she can't be made to go to bed until he is safe at home."

"And only thirteen years old!" rejoined the comtesse. "The wretched girl!"

"No," Olympe replied, "she is not wretched; this passion will be her salvation."

"From what?" asked Madame de Montcornet.

"From the fate that is in store for almost every girl of her age. She is not so bad-looking now that I have cleaned her up and made her presentable, and there is something wild and fantastic about her that takes the men's fancy. She has changed so that madame wouldn't know her. Nicolas, the son of the old rascal who keeps the Grand-I-vert and the hardest case in the whole commune, is after the child and follows her up as he would pursue the wild game of the forest. If it is incredible that a man as rich as Monsieur Rigou should have begun to pester this ugly duckling with his attentions when she was only twelve years old, it is quite sure that Nicolas has his eye on la Péchina; Justin told me so. It is frightful to think of, for the peasants about here live like brute beasts; but don't be alarmed, madame: Justin and I and our two servants will look after the little one; she never goes out alone, except by daylight, and then never farther than the gate of Conches. And if she should be taken unawares, her sentiment for Justin would give her strength and courage to resist, just as every woman who has a preference can beat off the man she hates."

"It was on her account that I came to see you to-day," said the comtesse; "I had no idea that my visit would be so opportune. The child won't be thirteen forever. She is going to make a very pretty girl."

"Oh, madame!" Olympe rejoined with a smile of confidence, "I am not afraid of Justin. Such a man! and such a heart in him! If you but knew how grateful he is toward his general, to whom he declares he is indebted for all his happiness. He is *too* devoted; he would risk his life as he would in battle, and he forgets that he will soon be a father."

"Well, well," said the comtesse, looking at Olympe in a way that brought the roses to her cheek, "at the time you left me I was sorry, but I am not sorry now, seeing you so happy. What a sublime and noble thing is conjugal love!" she added, giving utterance to the thought that she had not dared express before the Abbé Brossette a short while before.

Virginie de Troisville remained wrapped in meditation, and Madame Michaud respected her silence.

"Tell me, is the child truthful?" inquired the comtesse, with a sudden start as of one waking from a dream.

"You can believe what she says as you would believe me, madame," replied Madame Michaud.

"Knows how to hold her tongue?"

"Like the grave."

"And is she affectionate?"

"Ah, madame, her humility toward me at times bespeaks an angelic nature. She comes and kisses my hands, and sometimes she says the queerest things. 'Do people ever die of love?' she asked me only day before yesterday. 'Why do you ask that question?' says I. 'I wanted to know if it is a malady!'"

"And she said that?" exclaimed the comtesse.

"Yes, and I could tell you a great deal more if I could only remember all her sayings," replied Olympe. "She seems to know more of the subject than I do myself."

"Do you believe she is capable of taking your place and being to me what you were? for I find I can't get along without an Olympe by me," said the comtesse, smiling rather sadly.

"Not at present, madame — she is too young; but in a couple of years she might. And then I could send you word at any time if it should seem best to remove her from here. She has much to learn yet, for she knows nothing of the world. Old Niseron, Geneviève's grandfather, is one of those men who would cut off their right hand rather than tell a lie; he would stand before a bakery and starve. Those opinions are inbred with him, and his granddaughter has been brought up in them. The Péchina would consider herself your equal, for the good man has made a stanch Republican of her, as he says—just as old Fourchon is bringing Mouche up to be a Bohemian. *I* laugh at her notions, but they might not please you; she would respect you as a benefactress, not as a superior. What can you expect! the little thing is as wild and untamed as a hawk. And besides, her mother's blood has something to do with it all."

"Who was her mother?"

"What, did madame never hear the story? Well, then, the son of the old sacristan at Blangy, an extremely fine-looking young fellow, so every one says, fell into the clutches of the great conscription. In 1809 this member of the Niseron family was nothing more than a gunner, whose battery was attached to an army corps that had orders to advance from Illyria and Dalmatia through Hungary in order to cut off the retreat of the Austrian army in the event of the emperor's gaining a victory at Wagram. Michaud was in Dalmatia; he told me all about the movement. Niseron, like the lady-killer he was, while in garrison at Zara gained the love of a pretty Montenegrin, a mountain lass, who was not particularly averse to the attentions of the French soldiers. This resulted in the girl's losing caste with her countrywomen and being compelled to leave the city after the withdrawal of our troops. So Zéna Kropoli, who received from her compatriots the epithet of the *French Girl*, followed the artillerymen. She found her way to France after the declaration of peace. Auguste Niseron solicited permission from his family to marry the Montenegrin, but the poor woman died in January, 1810, at Vincennes, in giving birth to Geneviève. The necessary papers validating the marriage arrived a few days later. Auguste Niseron wrote to his father, asking him to come to Vincennes, bringing with him a wet nurse, remove the child and take charge of it. It was fortunate he did so, for he was killed at Montereau by an exploding shell. The little Dalmatian was baptized Geneviève in the parish church of Soulanges, where she obtained the protection of Mademoiselle Laguerre, who was deeply affected by the little romance; the child would seem to be fated to have the masters of Aigues for her protectors. From time to time Père Niseron received clothing for the little one, and even pecuniary assistance, from the chateau."

At that moment the comtesse and Olympe, looking from the window near them, beheld Michaud advancing toward Blondet and the Abbé Brossette, who were walking up and down the roadway before the house and conversing.

"Where is she?" asked the comtesse. "Your story has made me impatient to see her."

"She went to carry a pitcher of milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard, who lives near the Porte de Conches; she can't be far away, for she started more than an hour ago."

"Very well; I will walk along that way with the gentlemen; perhaps we shall meet her," said Madame Montcornet as she descended the stairs.

As the comtesse was opening her parasol Michaud came up to say that the general would probably leave her a widow for a couple of days.

"Michaud," said Madame de Montcornet in hurried accents, "you must not attempt to deceive me; I know that grave events are occurring in the neighborhood. Your wife is beset with fears, and if there are many people like that old Fourchon about here this is not a fit country to live in—"

"If what you say were so, madame," Michaud laughingly made answer, "we

keepers would not be long in the land of the living, for it is the easiest thing in the world to get rid of us. The peasants are kicking up a little fuss, that's all there is of it. You'll find they won't go any further, though; they value their lives too much, the air of the fields is too sweet to them. Olympe has been frightening you with some of these absurd rumors, but a woman in her condition is scared to death by a bad dream," he added, taking his wife's arm and pressing it in a way to enjoin silence.

"Cornevin! Juliette!" cried Michaud's wife, in quick response to whose appeal the face of the old cook appeared at the kitchen window, "I will be back presently; look out for the pavilion while I'm gone."

Two huge dogs set up a loud barking, showing that the Porte d'Avonne was not without a garrison. At the racket raised by the mastiffs Cornevin, an old fellow from le Perche, Olympe's foster-father, emerged from a clump of trees, exposing to view one of those hard-featured countenances of which his district would seem to have the monopoly. The old man had "been out" with the Chouans in 1794 and '99.

Accompanied by her guests and by Michaud and his wife, the comtesse struck into that one of the six forest alleys which led straight to the Porte de Conches, and was crossed by Silver Spring brook. The curé, Michaud and his wife were talking in an undertone of the disclosures that had been made to Madame de Montcornet concerning the condition of the country.

"Perhaps the hand of Providence is in it," the curé was saying; "for if madame so wills it, we may yet succeed, by gentleness and kindness, in softening those men's hearts—"

About six hundred yards from the pavilion, the comtesse perceived, lying in fragments in the alley, a red earthenware pitcher, and the traces of spilled milk.

"What can have happened to your little charge?" said she, calling to Michaud and his wife, who had turned and were on their way back to the pavilion.

"She has met with an accident like Perrette's," Blondet replied.

"No, the child has been surprised and chased by some one, for she threw her pitcher to the side of the path," said the Abbé Brossette, stooping to examine the ground.

"It is the trace of the Péchina's foot, most certainly," said Michaud. "She must have turned very suddenly, for see how she has disturbed the gravel. Yes, that's it; she must have wheeled and run for the pavilion as hard as she could."

The head keeper advanced slowly, observing minutely the imprint of footsteps along the pathway, and came to a halt in the middle of the alley, about a hundred paces from where the fragments of the pitcher lay, at which point the traces of Péchina's footsteps ended.

"She turned and made for the Avonne here," he said. "Perhaps she found her retreat cut off in the direction of the pavilion."

"But she has been away from the house more than an hour!" cried Madame Michaud.

Consternation was depicted on every face. The curé moved rapidly off toward the pavilion to examine the condition of the road in that direction, while Michaud, with the same thought, went up the path toward Conches.

"Good heavens, she must have fallen here!" said Michaud, as he came back to the spot where the footprints were interrupted in the middle of the alley. "Look there!"

It was true; the gravel of the alley testified unmistakably to the fall of a human body there.

"The footprints going toward the forest are those of a person wearing felt shoes," said the curé.

"The footprints of a woman," observed the comtesse.

"And those down yonder, where the broken pitcher lies, were made by a man," Michaud added.

"I do not see traces of more than one person's footsteps here," said the curé,

who had followed as far as the wood the trail left by the woman who wore felt shoes.

"They must have carried her into the wood!" exclaimed Michaud.

"If it is really a woman's footstep, the mystery is inexplicable," remarked Blondet.

"That Nicolas, the brute, has had something to do with the business," Michaud grimly said. "He has been prowling about and watching the Péchina for some days past. I lay hid for two whole hours under the bridge of the Avonne this morning, trying to catch the dirty rascal. He may have had a woman to help him in his undertaking—"

"It is frightful!" said the comtesse.

"Oh! the Péchina won't let herself be entrapped," said the keeper. "She is as likely as not to have thrown herself into the Avonne and swam across. I think I will go down and take a look at the river-bank. Do you, my dear Olympe, return to the pavilion, and you, gentlemen, with madame, will do well to walk along the path toward Conches."

"What a country!" exclaimed the comtesse.

"You will find bad characters wherever you go," observed Blondet.

"Is it true, curé," asked Madame de Montcornet, "that I saved this child from Rigou's clutches?"

"You may consider that every girl under fifteen that you are so kind as to receive at the château is a victim wrested from that monster," the Abbé Brossette replied. "When he tried to entice this child to his house at her tender age the renegade had two objects in view, to satisfy his base appetite and his vengeance. When I engaged Père Niseron as sacristan I impressed on the simple-minded man what Rigou's intentions were, who had a good deal to say about repairing the wrongs of his uncle, my predecessor in the curacy. That is one of the old mayor's grievances against me; it contributes to swell his hate. Père Niseron swore a solemn oath in Rigou's presence that if any harm came to Geneviève he would kill him, and further, that he should hold him responsible for any attempt against the child's honor. I would not be surprised to learn that Nicolas Tonsard's persecutions are only the result of some infernal plot of this old sinner, who firmly believes that his will is law in the commune."

"He has no respect for justice, then?" said Blondet.

"In the first place, he is father-in-law to the procureur du roi," replied the curé, who paused for a moment. "Then you can have no idea," he continued, "of the utter indifference that the police of the canton and the public prosecutor and his officers display toward these gentry. So long as the peasants refrain from burning farm-buildings and poisoning wells; so long as they don't commit murder, and pay their taxes promptly, they are allowed to do pretty much as they please otherwise; and as they are devoid of all religious principle, the state of affairs is most horrible. Why, on the other side of the Avonne valley there are feeble old men who dare not remain alone at home, for in that case they would be given nothing to eat, so they fare forth to the field until their poor old legs refuse to support them longer; if they once take to their bed, they know it is only to die of starvation. Monsieur Sarcus, the justice of the peace, says that should the Government attempt to bring all the criminal class to justice it would be ruined by the costs."

"There is a clear-sighted magistrate for you!" cried Blondet.

"Ah, monseigneur used to know how things were in this valley, and particularly in this commune," the curé went on. "Religion is the only cure for so many and so great evils; the law to me seems powerless, with all the changes they have made in it—"

The good man's reflections were broken in upon by shouts emanating from the forest, and the comtesse, preceded by Emile and the abbe, courageously darted forward in the direction of the sounds.

XI.

THE OARISTYS, EIGHTEENTH ECLOGUE OF THEOCRITUS, NOT MUCH LIKED IN A COURT OF ASSIZES.

THE sagacity of the Indian, which Michaud's new business had developed in him, together with a knowledge of the passions and interests of the commune of Blangy, have served to explain in part a new idyl in the Greek style.

Nicolas, Tonsard's second son, had drawn an unlucky number in the conscription. Two years previous, thanks to the intervention of Soudry, Gaubertin, and Sarcus the Rich, his elder brother had been pronounced unfit for military service, because of a pretended weakness in the muscles of the right arm, but as Jean Louis had since wielded the heaviest implements of husbandry with remarkable facility, some rumor of it had got about in the canton.

Soudry, Rigou and Gaubertin, the protectors of the family, therefore warned the innkeeper that it would be of no use for him to try and shelter the great, strong Nicolas from the conscription law. Nevertheless, the mayor and Rigou were so alive to the necessity of conciliating men who were so bold and so capable of evil doing, cleverly directed by themselves against les Aigues, that Rigou gave some hope to Tonsard and his son.

The late monk, to whom Catherine, who was excessively devoted to her brother, went from time to time, advised her to apply to the comte and comtesse.

"Perhaps they will not be sorry for the opportunity to do you this service, in order to conciliate you, and we shall have gained that much," he said to Catherine. "And if the shopman refuses you—well, we will see."

Rigou foresaw that the refusal of the general would augment by a new grievance the wrongs the peasants suffered from the great landowners, and would give to the confederates a new opportunity of earning Tonsard's gratitude, in case the ex-mayor's crafty mind could conceive some means of liberating Nicolas.

Nicolas, who was soon to appear before the board of review, had little hope that the general would interfere, because of the grudge which les Aigues had against the Tonsards. Realizing that his speedy departure left him no time for winning la Péchina, he resolved at all hazards to obtain a final interview with her. But the girl scorned and despised him, and eluded all his attempts to speak with her. For three days now he had watched for her, and she was well aware of the fact. Whenever she went a few steps away from the gate, she saw Nicolas's head in one of the alleys running parallel to the park, or on the Avonne bridge. She might have rid herself of this unwelcome persecution by applying to her grandfather, but she hesitated to put the two men more at enmity than they already were.

Genevieve had heard Père Niseron threaten to kill any man who should harm his grandchild, and the thought of possible horrors which might follow any complaint on her part, kept her silent.

Before she ventured forth to carry the milk which Madame Michaud sent to Gaillard's daughter, who kept the Conches gate, and whose cow had lately calved, la Péchina first reconnoitered, like a cat when it puts its paw out of the door. She saw no trace of Nicolas; she listened to the silence, as the poet says, and hearing nothing, she supposed that her persecutor was at work. The peasants had begun to cut their grain, for they harvested their own little plots of ground first, in order to be at liberty to earn the high wages given to the harvesters. But Nicolas was not the man to mind losing two days' work, especially as he was to leave the country after the Soulanges fair, and for the peasant, to become a soldier is to enter upon another state of existence.

When la Péchina, with her pitcher on her head, had accomplished half her journey, Nicolas sprang like a wildcat from among the branches of an elm where he had concealed himself in the foliage, and fell like a thunderbolt at her feet. La Péchina threw down her pitcher

and trusted to her agility to gain the pavilion. A hundred feet farther on, Catherine Tonsard, who had also been on the watch, emerged from the wood, and sprang so heavily upon la Péchina that she knocked her down. The violence of the blow stunned the child; Catherine picked her up, took her in her arms and carried her into the wood, to a small grassy spot where one of the springs bubbled up which formed the source of the Argent.

Catherine was tall and large, like the models which painters and sculptors use to represent Liberty. She had the same full bust, the same muscular limbs, the same robust yet flexible figure, the same plump arms and sparkling eyes; the same proud haughty air, full curls, and lips parted in the half-ferocious smile which Eugene Delacroix and David (d'Angers) have both so admirably caught and represented. The fiery, embrowned Catherine was the image of the people; she flashed forth insurrections from her clear yellow eyes, which were piercing and full of soldierly insolence. She inherited from her father a violence which caused every one in the cabaret, except Tonsard himself, to fear her.

"Well, how are you, old woman?" inquired Catherine of la Péchina.

She had deposited her burden on a hillock near the spring, and restored her to consciousness by dashing cold water upon her.

"Where am I?" asked the young girl, opening her beautiful dark eyes, so bright that it seemed as if a ray of sunshine had suddenly gleamed forth.

"If it had not been for me," said Catherine, "you would have died."

"Thanks!" replied the girl, in astonishment. "What happened to me?"

"You stubbed your toe against a root, and fell flat, as if you had been shot. Ah! how you were running! You were running as if for your life."

"It was your brother's fault," replied la Péchina, remembering that she had seen Nicolas.

"My brother! I did not see him," said Catherine. "And what did poor Nicolas do to you, that you should run from him as if he were a wolf? Is he not handsomer than your Monsieur Michaud?"

"Oh!" said la Péchina, with a gesture of superb scorn.

"See here, little one, you will make trouble for yourself if you love those who persecute us. Why don't you take our part?"

"Why do you never go to church? and why do you steal by night and by day?" demanded the girl.

"Those are bourgeois reasons," replied Catherine disdainfully, and without suspecting la Péchina's attachment. "The bourgeois love us as they love good cooking; they must have new dishes every day. Where did you ever see a bourgeois who would marry one of us peasants? You see if Sarcus the Rich allows his son to marry the beautiful Gatienne Giboulard, of Auxerre, although she is the daughter of a rich miller. You never went to Socquard's, at the Tivoli of Soulanges; come with me there, and you will see the bourgeois. You will think they are hardly worth the money they throw to us. Come to the fair this year!"

"They say that the fair at Soulanges is beautiful!" exclaimed la Péchina, naïvely.

"I can tell you what it is," said Catherine. "Every one looks at a girl when she is pretty. Of what use is it for you to be as pretty as you are, if you cannot be admired? The first time I ever heard some one say: 'What a fine girl!' all my blood was on fire. That was at Socquard's, in the midst of a dance; my grandfather, who was playing on the clarionet, heard it and smiled. Tivoli seemed to me as grand and beautiful as heaven; it is all lighted by glass lamps, you see, and it looks like Paradise. The gentlemen of Soulanges and Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes are all there. Ever since that night I have always loved the place where that sentence sounded in my ears like martial music. A girl would give her soul, my child, to hear that said of her by a man whom she loved."

"Yes, perhaps so," replied la Péchina, pensively.

"Come, then, and listen to it there," exclaimed Catherine. "You will be sure to hear it. A beautiful girl like you has plenty of chances. Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, who has a coat with gold buttons, might want to marry you. And that is not all one finds there. If you only knew! See here, Socquard's boiled wine makes you forget all your troubles. It gives you the most beautiful dreams! you feel as if you were walking upon air. Have you never drank boiled wine? Well then, you have never known what it is to live."

This privilege which grown-up people possess of drinking boiled wine now and then so excites the curiosity of children, that Genevieve had once wet her lips in a small glassful of it which had been ordered by the doctor for her sick grandfather. This trial had left such a magical memory in the child's mind, that she listened all the more readily to Catherine, who counted upon this very thing to complete the plan which had already partly succeeded.

"What do they put in it?" asked la Péchina.

"All sorts of things," replied Catherine, looking furtively around to see if her brother were coming; "in the first place, things which come from the Indies, cinnamon, and herbs which change you by enchantment. You think you have everything you love best. It makes you happy. You don't mind anything."

"I should be afraid to drink boiled wine at the dance," said la Péchina.

"Why?" returned Catherine; "there is not the least danger; just think of all the people you will see there! All the bourgeois will look at us. Ah! days like those make up for a good many weeks of misery. A girl would be content to see that and die."

"If Monsieur and Madame Michaud would only come—" said la Péchina, with her eyes on fire.

"But you have not given up your grandfather Niseron, the poor dear man, and he would be so pleased to see you adored like a queen. Do you prefer these bourgeois, Michaud and the rest, to your grandfather and the Burgundians? You must not deny your own people. And after all, the Michauds could not object, if your grandfather himself took you to the fete. Oh! if you only knew what it was to have a man so devoted to you that when you said 'go' he would go, and when you said 'come' he would come. And your looks, little one, are enough to turn any man's head. Since those people at the pavilion have taken you up, you look like an empress."

Catherine, while adroitly making la Péchina forget Nicolas, and thus causing suspicion to disappear from her innocent soul, distilled the superfine ambrosia of compliments for her. And without knowing it, she had put her finger upon a tender place. La Péchina, while nothing but a poor peasant, was extremely precocious. Her mixture of Montenegrin blood with that of Burgundy, and her birth in the midst of the hardships of war, no doubt contributed to this effect. She was slight, slender, brown as a tobacco leaf, and petite; she possessed an incredible amount of strength, which was invisible to the peasant eye, to whom the mysteries of nervous organisms are unknown. Nerves do not enter into the medical system in the country.

At the age of thirteen, Genevieve had "got her growth," as the saying is, although she was small for her age. Did her face owe to its origin or to the sun of Burgundy its topaz tint, at once somber and brilliant; somber in color, and brilliant in the grain of its tissue, which made her appear mature, although still only a girl? But this maturity of look was redeemed by the vivacity, the sparkle and the richness of light which made la Péchina's eyes look like two stars. Like all eyes full of sunshine, which perhaps require a powerful shade, the eyelashes were wonderfully long. The hair, which was blue-black, and fine, long and abundant, crowned with its masses a forehead modeled after that of the antique Juno. This magnificent diadem of hair, these great Armenian eyes and this goddess-like brow made the rest of the face seem

insignificant. The nose, although pure in drawing at its beginning, terminated in broad, flat nostrils. Passion sometimes inflated these nostrils, and gave to the face an expression that was almost furious. In like manner with the nose, all the lower part of the face seemed unfinished, as if the clay in the fingers of the divine Sculptor had suddenly given out. Between the lower lip and the chin the space was so short that any one in attempting to take la Péchina by the chin would be obliged to touch her lips; but the teeth distracted attention from this fault; they seemed endowed with souls of their own, so brilliant, well-shaped and transparent were they; they were plainly revealed by a mouth which was rather large, and which was rendered noticeable by sinuosities that made the lips resemble the odd windings of the coral.

The shell-shaped ears were so transparent that they looked rosy in the sunshine. The complexion, though radiant, showed a marvelous delicacy of skin. If, as Buffon says, love lies in the touch, the softness of this skin must have been as active and penetrating as the scent of the datura. The chest, as well as the body, was very thin; but the feet and hands, which were wonderfully small, showed unusual nervous power, and an active organism.

This mingling of diabolical imperfections and divine beauties, which was harmonious in spite of its dissonances, for it was made in unison by means of a native pride; this defiance which was written in the eyes, that of a powerful soul in a feeble body, made the girl something marvelous. Nature had created her a woman, and the circumstances of her antecedents and birth had given her the face and physique of a boy. She was like the Afrite and the Genii of the Arabian Nights.

Her appearance did not belie her individuality. She had the soul of her fiery look, the spirit of the lips made brilliant by her wonderful teeth, the thought of her sublime forehead, and the fury of her dilating nostrils. Thus love, as it is felt on the burning sands and in the deserts, agitated the mature heart of this thirteen-year-old child of Montenegro, who, like that snowy summit, was never to know the flowers of springtime.

It will thus be understood that la Péchina, by means of the passion which flashed in her every pore, was capable of attracting not only the young, commonplace Nicolas, but also the old usurer, Rigou. The two extremes of life united on this common ground, this fancy for the young girl whom all the inhabitants of the valley had been in the habit of pitying as a sickly deformity.

It is easy now to understand the exclamation: "Piccina!" which had escaped the comtesse when she had seen Genevieve on the high-road, in the previous year, wondering at the sight of a carriage and a lady dressed as Madame de Montcornet was dressed. This was the girl who loved the great, beautiful, noble head keeper, as children of her age know how to love, with childish fervor, with the strength of youth, and with the devotion which is born of true poetry. Catherine passed her coarse hands over the most delicate, most highly strung cords of this harp. To dance beneath Michaud's eyes, to go to the Soulanges fete, to shine there, to write herself upon the memory of her master! What ideas! To put them into her volcanic head was to throw live coals upon straw that had been dried in the August sun.

"No, Catherine," replied la Péchina; "I am ugly and small; my destiny is to live alone, and unmarried."

"Men like little women," replied Catherine. "Do you see me?" and she extended her arms; "my style pleases Godain, and little Charles, who came with the comte; but Lupin's son is afraid of me. It is only the little men who admire me, and who say at Ville-aux-Fayes or Soulanges: 'What a fine girl!' But you will please the large men."

"Ah! Catherine, are you sure?" cried la Péchina, delighted.

"It is true, because Nicolas, who is the handsomest man in the canton, raves about you; he dreams of you, and he

thinks of nothing else, and yet he is liked by all the girls. He is a proud fellow! If you wear a white dress and yellow ribbons, you will be the most beautiful girl in Socquard's house, on the day of Notre-Dame, in the eyes of everybody from Ville-aux-Fayes. Come, will you go? Here, I was cutting some grass there for my cows; I have in my gourd a little boiled wine which Socquard gave me this morning," she added, watching la Péchina's expression. "I feel good-natured, and we will share it; then you will believe that you are beloved—"

While this conversation was going on, Nicolas, choosing the softest tufts of grass on which to place his feet, had slipped up noiselessly as far as the trunk of a great oak, a short distance behind the hillock on which his sister and la Péchina were seated. Catherine, who kept glancing around, at length saw her brother just as she was about to take the gourd of boiled wine.

"Here, take some," she said to the girl.

"It burns me," said Genevieve, returning the gourd to Catherine after taking two swallows.

"Stupid! look," returned Catherine, emptying the rustic flask at a draught, "let it slip down like that! it is like a ray of sunshine to light up your stomach."

"But I ought to have carried my milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard," exclaimed la Péchina. "Nicolas frightened me."

"Then you don't like Nicolas?"

"No," replied la Péchina. "Why does he run after me? There are plenty of girls who do like him."

"But if he likes you better than all the girls in the valley?"

"I am sorry for him," she returned coldly.

"It is easy to see that you don't know him," replied Catherine.

At the same time she seized her by the arm. Genevieve, turning quickly, perceived Nicolas.

When she saw her detested admirer, she uttered a loud cry, and twisting herself free from Catherine with unlooked-for dexterity, she started to run. Catherine, however, caught hold of her once more, and tripped her up, so that she fell to the ground. Springing up again, she called loudly for help, as Nicolas attempted to detain her, and seizing him by the throat, she closed her fingers tightly upon it, in an agony of fear.

"She is strangling me! Help, Catherine!" he called, in a voice which he could scarcely make audible.

La Péchina was by this time uttering piercing cries, which Catherine sought to stifle by putting her hand over the girl's mouth; but la Péchina bit her fingers until she drew blood.

Just then Blondet, the comtesse and the curé appeared on the border of the woods.

"There are the bourgeois of les Aigues," said Catherine, stepping back.

"Do you want to live?" asked Nicolas, in a harsh whisper.

"What do you mean?" returned la Péchina.

"Tell them that we were only playing, and I will forgive you," replied Nicolas, darkly.

"Do you promise?" added Catherine, whose look was even more terrible than Nicolas's murderous threat.

"Yes, if you will let me alone," replied the girl. "Besides, I shall never go out again without my scissors."

"You keep still, now, or I will kick you into the Avonne," said the ferocious Catherine.

"You are a pair of monsters," cried the curé. "You deserve to be arrested and taken before the court."

"Come now! what do you folks do in your salons?" said Nicolas, giving Blondet and the comtesse such a look that they shivered. "You play with each other, don't you? Well, the fields are ours. We can't work all the time; we were playing. Ask my sister and la Péchina if we were not."

"I wonder how you fight, if that is the way you play?" said Blondet.

Nicolas threw a murderous look at him.

"Speak!" said Catherine, taking la Péchina by the arm and clutching it until it was black and blue, "were we not amusing ourselves?"

"Yes, madame, we were amusing our-

selves," replied the girl, who was completely exhausted, and looked as if she were ready to faint.

"You hear, madame?" said Catherine boldly, darting one of those looks at the comtesse which, from woman to woman, are like so many dagger thrusts.

She took her brother's arm, and they went away together, knowing that they had not imposed upon those whom they left behind. Nicolas turned twice, and each time he caught Blondet's eye. The journalist looked contemptuously after the great fellow, who was five feet eight inches tall. His coloring was vigorous, his hair was black and curly, and his shoulders broad; and his face, whose expression was not naturally one of bad-humor, had lines around the mouth which betrayed his innate cruelty and idleness. Catherine was holding up her blue and white striped skirt with a sort of perverse coquetry.

"Cain and his wife!" said Blondet to the curé.

"You do not know how nearly right you are," returned the abbé.

"Ah! Monsieur le Curé, what will they do to me?" asked la Péchina, when the brother and sister were too far away to hear her voice.

The comtesse, who was as white as her handkerchief, was so much agitated that she did not hear either Blondin, the curé, or la Péchina.

"It is enough to make one want to run away from this terrestrial paradise," she murmured at length. "But the first thing to be done is to save this child from them."

"You are right; this child is a poem, a living poem," said Blondet, in a low voice to the comtesse.

The girl just then was in that state in which the soul and body smoke, as it were, after the fire of an anger which has called every intellectual and physical faculty into play. Dressed in a gown of alternate brown and yellow stripes, with a collar which she had herself ironed early that morning, the girl had as yet taken no thought of her earth-stained dress and her crushed collar. When she found that her hair had fallen down, she looked for her comb. It was just at this moment that Michaud, who had also been attracted by the cries, appeared upon the scene. When she saw him, la Péchina recovered all her energy.

"No one harmed me, Monsieur Michaud," she cried.

Her words and look told Blondet and the curé instantly more even than Madame Michaud had told the comtesse concerning the strange girl's infatuation for the head keeper. He, however, did not perceive it.

"The wretch!" cried Michaud, and by that involuntary but powerless gesture, which is employed by fools and wise men alike, he shook his fist at Nicolas, whose burly form was disappearing in the shadows of the forest which he and his sister were entering.

"Then you were not playing," said the abbé, looking keenly at la Péchina.

"Do not tease her," said the comtesse; "and let us go back."

La Péchina, although exhausted, had yet sufficient strength to walk: her beloved master was looking at her! The comtesse followed Michaud along one of those footpaths known only to poachers and keepers, where two could not walk abreast, but which led them straight to the Avonne gate.

"Michaud," she said, when they were in the midst of the woods, "some way must be found of ridding the country of this wicked wretch; the child's life may not be safe."

"In the first place," replied Michaud, "the child shall not leave the pavilion alone again; my wife will take into the house Vatel's nephew, who has the care of the park alleys; we will let some fellow from my wife's country take his place, for we must not put any men at les Aigues just now of whom we are not sure. With Gounod and Cornevin, the old foster-father, in the house, the cows will be well cared for, and la Péchina will not go out alone."

"I will speak to my husband about helping you out with the extra expense," replied the comtesse; "but this does not

rid us of Nicolas. How shall we accomplish that?"

"The means is simple, and is already found," answered Michaud. "Nicolas is to go in a few days to the recruiting-board; instead of asking that he be exempted from service, the general, upon whose protection Tonsard is counting, has only to recommend that he be accepted—"

"I will go myself, if it be necessary," said the comtesse, "to see my cousin De Castéran, our prefect; but in the meantime I am afraid—"

These words were exchanged at the end of the path which terminated at the main alley. When they reached the top of the ditch, the comtesse involuntarily uttered a cry; Michaud came quickly forward to help her, thinking she had hurt herself with some thorn; but he started at the sight which met his eyes.

Marie and Bonnebault, seated beside the ditch, seemed to be talking together, but were undoubtedly concealed there for the purpose of listening. They had evidently left their place in the wood upon hearing the sound of voices.

After six years of service in the cavalry, Bonnebault, who was a tall, thin fellow, had returned to Conches some months previously, with a discharge which he owed to his misconduct; he would have spoiled the best of soldiers by his example. He wore mustaches and a goatee, a peculiarity which, added to the prestige of the attitude and bearing that soldiers acquire in barracks, made Bonnebault the admiration of all the girls in the valley. Like all soldiers, his hair was cut short behind, while that on the top of his head was curled. He brushed it back from his face with a coquettish air, and put his foraging cap jauntily on one side. Compared to the other peasants, who were usually in rags, like Mouche and Fourchon, he seemed superb in his linen pantaloons, his boots, and his little short vest. These clothes, bought at the time when he received his discharge, were somewhat the worse for his field life; but the cock of the valley possessed better ones for fête days. He was said to live upon the liberality of his friends, and the sums that he received barely sufficed for the dissipations of all kinds to which frequent visits to the Café de la Paix gave rise.

In spite of his round, flat face, which was not displeasing at first sight, the rascal had something sinister in his aspect.

One reason for this may have been that he squinted, or, to speak more correctly, one of his eyes did not follow the movement of the other; he was not exactly cross-eyed, but his eyes were not always together, to borrow a term from the artists. This defect, although slight, gave a dark, uneasy look to his expression, in which it was in accord with the movement of the forehead and brows that revealed a laxity of character, a disposition to degradation.

In cowardice as in courage, there are several kinds. Bonnebault, who would have fought like the bravest of soldiers, was a coward before his own vices. Idle as a lizard, active only in what pleased him, without any delicacy, at once proud and mean, capable of everything, but too indolent to achieve anything, his happiness consisted in doing evil or in laying waste. This kind of character does as much harm in the depths of the country as in a regiment. Bonnebault, like Tonsard and Fourchon, wanted to live well and do nothing. Therefore he had his plans all made. While making the most of his fine figure, with ever-increasing success, and of his talent at billiards, with varying fortune, he flattered his fancy with the idea that some day, in his quality of habitual frequenter of the Café de la Paix, he would marry Mademoiselle Aglae, the only daughter of Père Socquard, the proprietor of the establishment, which, in proportion, was to Soulanges what Ranelagh is to the Bois de Boulogne. To embrace the career of innkeeper, and to have the responsibility of the public balls, was a destiny which seemed like wielding a marshal's baton to a do-nothing like him. The rascal's morals, life and character were so plainly written upon his face, that the comtesse allowed a slight exclamation to escape her, at sight of the couple, who

made much the same impression upon her as if they had been a couple of serpents. Marie's head was turned concerning Bonnebault. His mustache and his bold air went to her heart, as the fascinations and fashion and manners of a De Marsay please a *Parisienne*. Each social sphere has its distinction! The jealous Marie repelled Amaury, the other dandy of the little town; she wanted to be Madame Bonnebault.

"Hallo! Are you coming? Hallo!" called Catherine and Nicolas in the distance, when they saw Marie and Bonnebault.

The shill cry resounded in the woods like the call of savages.

When he saw the couple, Michaud started, for he repented of having spoken. If Bonnebault and Marie had overheard the conversation, nothing but harm could come of it. This fact, apparently insignificant, was destined to have a decisive influence, in the existing state of feeling between les Aigues and the peasants; as in a battle, victory or defeat may depend upon a brook which a goathead may leap with both feet at once, but which the artillery cannot cross.

After saluting the comtesse gallantly, Bonnebault took Marie's arm with the air of a conqueror, and walked away triumphantly.

"That is a very dangerous man," said Michaud in a low tone to the comtesse. "If he lost twenty francs at billiards, he could be made even to assassinate Rigou. He turns as readily to a crime as to a pleasure."

"I have seen too much for one day," replied the comtesse, taking Emile's arm; "let us return, gentlemen."

She bowed in a melancholy way to Madame Michaud as she watched la Péchina enter the pavilion. She was profoundly sad.

"Madame," said the abbé, "does the difficulty of doing good here deter you from making the attempt? For five years I have lain on a pallet, lived in a house without furniture, said mass without anybody to listen to me, preached without an audience, and lived upon six hundred francs given me by the State, and given a third of that in charity, without asking more of the bishop. But I do not despair. If you knew what my winters are here, you would understand the full meaning of the word. I warm myself only with the hope of saving this valley, and reconquering it for God. It is not a question of us, madame, but of the future. We are ordained that we may say to the poor: 'Learn to be poor,' or in other words: 'Suffer, be resigned, and toil,' but at the same time we should also say to the rich: 'Learn how to be wealthy,' or in other words: 'Be intelligent in benevolence, pious, and worthy of the station in which God has placed you.' Well, madame, you are only the agents of the power which gives the fortune, and if you do not obey its conditions, you will not be able to transmit it to your children as you received it. You are despoiling your posterity. If you continue in the selfish course of this singer, whose indifference has most certainly caused the evil, the extent of which alarms you, you will see again the scaffolds where your predecessors died for the faults of their fathers. Do good obscurely, in some little corner of the earth; as Rigou, for example, does evil. Those deeds are the prayers which please God most. If in each commune three beings tried to do good, France, our beautiful country, would be saved from the abyss toward which we are hastening, and where we are being rapidly dragged by a religious indifference to everything that is not ours. Change your morals first, and then you can change your laws."

Although profoundly moved at this appeal of Catholic charity, the comtesse replied by the fatal *nous verrons* of the rich, a phrase which contains many promises, without calling upon the purse, and which permits them afterward to cross their arms in the comfortable belief that every evil is remedied.

When he heard her answer, the Abbé Brossette saluted Madame de Montcornet, and took a path which led directly to the Blangy gate.

"The feast of Belshazzar will be the eternal type of the last days of a caste,

an oligarchy, a domination," he said to himself. "My God, if it be Thy holy will to let loose the poor as a torrent to reform society, I can understand why thou wouldst abandon the rich to their blindness."

XII.

IN WHICH THE CABARET IS THE PARLIAMENT OF THE PEOPLE.

Old Mother Tonsard's screams had attracted several persons from Blangy, who were curious to know what was going on at the Grand-I-vert; for the distance between the cabaret and the village was no greater than that between the cabaret and the Blangy gate. One of these curious ones was Niseron himself, la Péchina's grandfather, who, after having rung the second Angelus, was returning to work in his little bit of vineyard, his last remaining piece of ground.

The old vine-dresser was bowed by toil; his face was pale, and his hair silver; he was the sole representative of honesty in the commune. During the Revolution he had been president of the club of the Jacobins at Ville-aux-Fayes, and one of the jury at the revolutionary tribunal of the district. Jean François Niseron, who was made of the same stuff as the apostles, had been a type of the portrait of Saint Peter, always the same, in which the painters have made him with the square forehead of the people, the strong, naturally curly hair of the laborer, the muscles of the man of toil, the complexion of the fisherman, the powerful nose, the half mocking mouth that scoffs at harm, and the neck and shoulders of the strong man who cuts fagots in the neighboring wood to make the fire for dinner, while the doctrinarians are disputing within.

Such, when he was forty years old, at the beginning of the Revolution, had been this man, hard as iron and pure as gold. He was an advocate of the people; and he believed in a Republic, liking the sonorous sound of the word, which was, perhaps, more imposing to him than the idea. He believed in the Republic of Jean Jacques Rousseau, in the brotherhood of men, in the exchange of fine sentiments, in the reward of merit, in election without intrigue, and in short, in all that in the limited extent of a small country, like Sparta, is possible, but which the proportions of an empire render nothing less than chimerical. He signed his opinions with his blood, for he sent his only son to the frontier; he did more, he signed them with his interests, the last sacrifice of egotism. He was the nephew and sole heir of the curé of Blangy, who, in consequence of his nephew's opinions, left his whole property to his servant. Niseron respected the decision of the testator, and accepted poverty, which came to him as promptly as decadence came to the Republic.

Never did a farthing, or a branch of a tree, belonging to another, pass into the hands of this sublime Republican, who would have made the Republic acceptable if he could have made people listen to his teachings. He refused to buy national property; he denied to the Republic the right of confiscation. In reply to the demands of the committee of public safety, he wanted the virtue of citizens to perform for the sainted country those miracles which those who intrigued for power would achieve by means of gold. This patriot of antiquity publicly reproached Gaubertin the father for his secret treasons, his connivance with wrong-doing, and his depredations. He reproved the virtuous Mouchon, the representative of the people, whose virtue was due largely to incapacity, like that of so many others who, gorged with the most immense political resources ever given by a nation, and armed with the whole force of a people, did not extricate from it as much grandeur as Richelieu succeeded in finding in the weakness of a king. Thus the citizen Niseron became a living reproach to everybody. The good man was therefore soon buried beneath the avalanche of forgetfulness with these words: "He is satisfied with nothing."

He went back to his home at Blangy, to see his illusions vanish one by one, to

see the Republic end in an empire, and to fall into the depths of poverty beneath the eyes of Rigou, who knew how to hypocritically bring him to that pass. Do you know why? Never had Jean Francois Niseron accepted anything from Rigou. Reiterated refusals told the man to whom the curé's property had fallen how deeply he was despised by the curé's nephew. And finally this cold contempt was crowned by the terrible threat concerning his granddaughter, of which the Abbé Brossette had spoken to the comtesse.

The old man had written a history of the twelve years of the French Republic, full of those grandiose features which give immortality to this heroic time. Crimes, massacres and spoliations the good man ignored; he had always admired devotion, righteous vengeance, gifts to the country, and the rally of the people to the frontiers, and he continued to dream still.

The Revolution has had many poets like Père Niseron, who sing their songs in the country or in the army, secretly or openly, by means of deeds concealed beneath the vapors of the hurricane, as, under the Empire, wounded men who had been forgotten cried out: "Vive l'Empereur!" before they died. This sublimity belongs especially to France.

The Abbé Brossette had respected this inoffensive conviction. The old man had become greatly attached to the curé, because he had once heard him say: "The true Republic is in the Gospel." And the old Republican carried the cross, and wore the robe, half red and half black, and was sober and serious at church, and lived on the triple functions with which he had been invested by the Abbé Brossette, who had thought to give the good man, not enough to live on, but enough to keep him from starving.

This old man, the Aristides of Blangy, spoke but little, like all the noble dupes who wrap themselves in the mantle of resignation; but he never hesitated to blame evil; therefore the peasants feared him as thieves fear the police. He did not come six times a year to the Grand-I-vert, although he was always welcome there. The old man cursed the want of charity in the rich, and their egotism repelled him, and this was the chord by which he seemed to be in unison with the peasants. Therefore they said: "Père Niseron does not like rick folks; he is one of us."

His beautiful life won for him from the whole valley the civilian's crown contained in these words: "The good Père Niseron! there never was a more honest man." He was often chosen as umpire in disputes, and was known by the magical name of "the village elder."

This old man, who was always extremely neat, although almost destitute, always wore small-clothes, long, milled stockings, hob-nailed shoes, the quasi-French coat with large buttons, which was still used by the older peasants, and the broad-brimmed felt hat; but on ordinary days he wore a vest of blue cloth which was so much patched that it resembled patchwork. The pride of the man who felt himself to be both free and deserving of his liberty was expressed on his face, in his step, and in something almost noble in his bearing; moreover, he was dressed in something besides rags.

"What is going on, mother," he said; "I heard you from the church."

They told the old man of Vatel's attempt, but they all spoke together, after the manner of country people.

"If you did not cut the tree, Vatel was wrong," said the old man; "but if you did cut the tree, then you have been guilty of two evil deeds."

"Take a glass of wine," said Tonsard, offering a full glass to the old man.

"Shall we go now?" asked Vermichel of the sheriff.

"Yes, we will do without Père Fourchon, and take the deputy of Conches," replied Brunet. "You go on; I must take this deed up to the chateau; Père Rigou has gained his second lawsuit, and I am to notify them of the verdict."

And Monsieur Brunet, ballasted by two little glasses of brandy, remounted his gray mare, after saying good-day to

Père Niseron, for every one in the valley respected the old man.

No science, not even that of statistics, can estimate the more than telegraphic rapidity with which news spreads in the country, nor how it leaps over the steppes of uncultivated land which are in France an accusation against administrators and capitals. It is a known fact in contemporaneous history that the most celebrated of bankers, after having nearly killed his horses between Waterloo and Paris (to gain what the emperor lost: a royalty) only preceded the fatal news by a few hours. Thus, an hour after the struggle between old mother Tonsard and Vatel, several other of the habitués of the Grand-I-vert were assembled there.

The first to come was Courtecuisse, in whom it would have been difficult to recognize the jovial game-keeper, the rubicund canon, for whom his wife made his café-au-lait in the morning, as we have seen in a former recital. Aged, thin and haggard, he offered to all a terrible lesson, which enlightened no one.

"He wanted to climb higher than the top of the ladder," those who pitied the man and blamed Rigou were told; "he wanted to be a bourgeois."

In truth, Courtecuisse, when he bought the estate of La Bachelerie, wanted to pass for a bourgeois, and had boasted to that effect. And now his wife went about picking up manure! She and her husband rose before daylight, dug their garden, which was richly manured, and succeeded in getting several crops from it, but without doing anything more than paying Rigou the interest due on the remainder of the price. Their daughter, who was at service at Auxerre, sent them her wages; but in spite of so many efforts and in spite of this help, they found themselves without a red cent when the money became due. Madame Courtecuisse, who had formerly allowed herself a bottle of boiled wine and a roast, now drank nothing but water. Courtecuisse scarcely dared enter the Grand-I-vert for fear of leaving three sous there; deprived of his power, he had lost his free drinks at the cabaret, and like an idiot he complained of ingratitude. In fact, like almost all peasants bitten by the demon of proprietorship, he found that food decreased in proportion as toil increased.

"Courtecuisse has built too many walls," they said, envious of his position. "He should not have made espaliers until he was his own master."

The good man had improved and fertilized the three acres of land sold him by Rigou, and the garden belonging to the house was beginning to bear, and he feared to be turned out. Dressed like Fourchon, he who had formerly worn shoes and huntsman's gaiters now went about in sabots, and he accused the bourgeois of les Aigues of having caused his poverty. This gnawing anxiety gave to the fat little man, and to his face, which had formerly been so jovial, a gloomy and stupefied appearance which made him resemble a sick man who is being devoured by a poison or by some chronic malady.

"What is the matter with you, Monsieur Courtecuisse? has any one cut off your tongue?" asked Tonsard, finding that the man remained silent after he had heard the story of the battle which had just taken place.

"It is enough to make one dumb, to try and think up some way of settling with Monsieur Rigou," replied the old man, dismally.

"Bah!" replied old Mother Tonsard, "you have a daughter seventeen years old; can't she do something for you?"

"We sent her to Auxerre, to Madame Mariotte the elder, two years ago, to get her out of harm's way," he replied. "I would rather die than—"

"Nonsense," interrupted Tonsard; "here are my girls; are they dead? And if any one dares to say that they are not good girls, he will have to reply to my gun."

"No," said Courtecuisse, shaking his head, "I will not have her troubled. I would rather get the money by shooting one of these Arminacs."

"You must not be too tender of her," said the innkeeper.

Père Niseron touched Tonsard lightly on the shoulder.

"What you have just said is not well," remarked the old man. "A father is the guardian of his family. In allowing your daughters such freedom, you have drawn censure upon yourself, and upon the class to which you belong. The masses of the people should set the rich an example of virtue and honor. You are selling yourself to Rigou, soul and body; do not bring your daughter into the question."

"Just see how badly off Courtecuisse is!" said Tonsard.

"Look at me," returned Père Niseron; "and yet I sleep quietly, and there are no thorns in my pillow."

"Let him talk, Tonsard," said the wife in her husband's ear. "Those are his ideas, you know, the poor dear man."

Bonnebault and Marie, with Catherine and her brother, arrived at this moment in a state of exasperation, caused by the knowledge of Michaud's project, which they had overheard. When Nicolas entered, he uttered a frightful curse upon the house of Michaud, and against les Aigues.

"It is harvest time," he said; "very well; I shall not go away without lighting my pipe at their haystacks." And he struck a great blow with his fist upon the table before which he was sitting.

"You must not chatter like that before everybody," said Godain, motioning toward Père Niseron.

"If he told a word, I would wring his neck as I would that of a chicken," returned Catherine fiercely; "he has had his day. They call him virtuous, but it is nothing but his temperament."

It was a strange and curious spectacle, all these lifted heads, all these people grouped in this hole of a place, at the door of which old Mother Tonsard had stationed herself as sentinel, to make sure that they could talk their secrets in safety.

Of all these faces, that of Godain, Catherine's lover, was perhaps the most frightful, although not the most pronounced. Godain was a miser without gold, the most cruel of all misers; for the man who seeks money takes precedence over the man who hoards it. The latter looks around him, but the former looks straight ahead with a terrible fixity. Godain was a type of the greater number of peasant faces.

He was a short man, who had been returned on account of not having the requisite height for the military service; he was naturally thin, and was still more withered by toil and by the dull sobriety beneath which excessive laborers like Courtecuisse expire in the country. He had a face no larger than a man's fist, which was lighted by two yellow eyes striped with green lines with brown dots, which showed a thirst for gain at any risk. His skin was glued to his temples, and was brown as that of a mummy. His scanty beard pricked through his wrinkles like stubble in the furrows. Godain never perspired; he did not thus waste his substance. His hairy, claw-like hands, nervous and constantly in motion, seemed to be made of old wood. Although he was scarcely twenty-seven years old, white threads could already be distinguished in his shock of reddish-black hair. He wore a blouse, through the opening in which could be seen, outlined in black, a shirt of strong linen, which he wore for more than a month, and then washed for himself in the Thune. His sabots were mended with old iron. The original material was no longer recognizable through the numerous patches and mendings; and on his head he wore a frightful cap, evidently picked up in the street at Ville-aux-Fayes.

Clairvoyant enough to see the elements of fortune in a marriage with Catherine, he wished to succeed Tonsard at the Grand-I-vert; he therefore employed all his cunning and power to capture her for his wife; he promised her riches and a free and happy life; and he finally guaranteed his future father-in-law an enormous rent, five hundred francs a year for the cabaret until he could buy it, trusting, by reason of an understanding that he had with M. Brunet, to making the payments by giving his note. He was a tool-

maker by trade, and worked for the wheelwright when work was plenty, but he also hired himself out by the day at high wages. Although he had about eighteen hundred francs, which he had placed with Gaubertin, unknown to any one, he lived like a beggar, sleeping in his master's barn, and gleaning at the harvest. He wore, sewed into the top of his Sunday pantaloons, Gaubertin's note, which increased in amount each year, by the added interest, and by his own savings.

"What do I care?" exclaimed Nicolas, in reply to Godain's prudent caution. "If I am to be a soldier, I would rather have the sawdust of the basket drink all my blood at once, than to shed it drop by drop. And I will rid the country of one of these Arminacs whom the devil has let loose upon us."

And he related what he called Michaud's plot against him.

"Where do you suppose France is to get her soldiers?" asked the white-headed old man gravely, rising and standing before Nicolas in the pause which followed this horrible threat.

"A man does his time and comes back," replied Bonnebault, twisting his mustache.

When he saw that the worst characters in the country-side were assembled, Niseron shook his head and left the cabaret, after offering a sou to Madame Tonsard in payment for his wine. When he had gone, the movement of satisfaction throughout the assembly proved that all those present felt that the living embodiment of their conscience had left them.

"Well, what do you say to all this, Courtecuisse?" asked Vaudoyer, who had come in accidentally and had just heard of Vatel's attempt.

Courtecuisse clicked his tongue against his palate, and put down his glass on the table.

"Vatel is wrong," he replied. "In the mother's place, I would wound myself, and go to bed, and pretend I was sick, and then I would have the shopman and his keeper arrested, and get twenty crowns damages out of them. Monsieur Sarcus would award them."

"At all events, the shopman would give them, in order to avoid scandal," said Godain.

Vaudoyer, the former garde-champetre, a man five feet six inches tall, with a face which was pitted with small-pox, and scooped like a nut-cracker, maintained a doubtful silence.

"Well," said Tonsard, attracted by the sixty francs, "what is the matter with that, you great canary bird? They might have broken twenty francs' worth of my mother, and this is a good way of getting even with them. We can make talk enough for three hundred francs, and Monsieur Gourdon can go and tell them at les Aigues that the mother broke her hip."

"And we would break it," interrupted his wife; "that is done in Paris."

"That would cost dear," replied Godain.

"I have heard too much about the king's people to believe that things would go as you wish," said Vaudoyer at last; for he had often assisted justice and the ex-brigadier Soudry. "As for Soulanges, that part of it would be all right; Monsieur Soudry represents the Government, and he wishes no good to the shopman; but the shopman and Vatel, if you attack them, will be malicious enough to defend themselves, and they will say: 'The woman was to blame; she had a tree; if not, she would have allowed her fagot to be examined on the road, and would not have run; if she got hurt, she has only her theft to thank for it.' No, you would not have a sure thing."

"Did the bourgeois defend himself when I had him summoned?" demanded Courtecuisse. "He paid me."

"If you like, I will go to Soulanges," said Bonnebault, "and consult Monsieur Gourdon, the clerk, and let you know this evening whether it will be of any use."

"You are only looking for an excuse to hang around that great turkey of a girl there at Socquard's," replied Marie Tonsard, giving him a pat on the shoulder that made his lungs ache.

Just then they heard a verse of the old Burgundian Christmas song:

"One fine moment of his life
Was when, at table one day,
He changed the water in the jar
To wine of Madeirā."

They all recognized the voice of old Père Fourchon, who seemed to be particularly pleased by the verse, and whom Mouche was accompanying in falsetto.

"Ah! they are full," cried old Mother Tonsard to her daughter-in-law; "your father is as red as a gridiron."

"Hail!" cried the old man; "what a lot of you beggars there are here! Hail!" he repeated to his granddaughter, whom he surprised in the act of kissing Bonnebault. "All hail! Marie, full of vices! may Satin be with thee; cursed art thou among women, etc. All hail, the company! You are done for. You may say farewell to your sheaves. There is some news. I told you the bourgeois would crush you; well, he is going to scourge you with the law. Ah! that is what it is to fight the bourgeois. They have made so many laws that they have one for every occasion."

A terrible hiccough suddenly gave another turn to the ideas of the honorable orator.

"If Vermichel was there I would blow in his mouth; he would think it was wine of Alicante! What a wine! If I were not a Burgundian, I would be a Spaniard. A wine of God! I believe the Pope uses it when he says his mass. What a wine! I am young again. See here, Courtecuisse, if your wife was here, I would think she was young again! There is no mistake about it, Spanish wine beats boiled wine. We must get up a revolution, if only for the sake of raiding the cellars."

"But what is your news, papa?" asked Tonsard.

"There will be no harvest for you all; the shopman forbids you to glean."

"Forbids the gleaning!" cried they all, the shrill tones of the women sounding above the rest.

"Yes," said Mouche, "he is going to take an order, and have it printed by Groison, and posted in the canton, and only those who have certificates of pauperism will be permitted to glean."

"And notice this!" added Fourchon; "the folks from the other communes will not be admitted."

"What! what!" said Bonnebault. "My grandmother, and I, and your mother, Godain, will we not be allowed to glean here? What a pack of idiots! a plague upon them! But this general of a mayor is letting loose all the devils of hell!"

"Shall you glean, Godain?" asked Tonsard of the wheelwright, who was talking to Catherine.

"I have nothing," he replied. "I am a pauper, and I shall apply for a certificate."

"What did they give father for his otter, my boy?" asked the innkeeper's wife of Mouche.

Although he was yielding to the pangs of indigestion, and his head was swimming from the effects of two bottles of wine, Mouche, seated upon Mother Tonsard's knee, put his head upon Madame Tonsard's neck and whispered softly in her ear:

"I don't know, but he has some gold. If you will give me plenty to eat for a month, perhaps I can find out his hiding-place; he has one."

"Father has some gold," whispered Madame Tonsard to her husband, who was talking louder than all the rest in the eager discussion that was going on.

"Hush! here comes Groison!" exclaimed the old woman.

A profound silence reigned in the cabaret. When Groison was once more at a safe distance, Mother Tonsard made a sign, and the discussion began again, as to whether they should glean, as in times past, without a certificate.

"You will have to obey," said Père Fourchon, "for the shopman has gone to see the prefect and ask for some troops to keep order. They will kill you like the dogs that we are," he cried, striving to overcome the thickness of utterance produced by the Spanish wine.

This announcement, ridiculous though

it was, made them all thoughtful; they believed the Government capable of massacring them without pity.

"There were troubles like that in the neighborhood of Toulouse, where I was in garrison," said Bonnebault; "we marched, and the peasants were bayoneted and arrested. It was fun to see them resisting the troops. Ten were sent to the galleys, and eleven to prison, and they were all crushed. The soldier is a soldier, and you are beggars; they have a right to bayonet you, and away you go."

"Well," said Tonsard, "what have we to fear from them, after all? Can they take anything from us? And if they put us in prison, they will at least give us something to eat; and the shopman cannot imprison the whole country. Besides, they are better fed at the king's expense than they are in their own houses, and they are warmed in winter."

"You are all ninnies!" shouted Père Fourchon. "It is better to gnaw at the bourgeois than to attack them openly; otherwise you will get your backs broken. If you really prefer imprisonment, of course that is another matter. One does not work so hard as in the fields, it is true, but neither does one have so much liberty."

"Perhaps," said Vaudoyer, who was the boldest in his advice, "it might be better for some of us to risk our skins in ridding the country of this beast of a Gevaudan who has planted himself at the Avonne gate."

"To make an end of Michaud?" asked Nicolas; "I am with you."

"The time has not come for that," said Fourchon; "we should lose too much. We must look miserable, and cry hunger; then the bourgeois of les Aigues and his wife will want to help us, and we will make more by that than by gleaning."

"You are a set of moles," cried Tonsard. "Suppose we do have a quarrel with the law and the troops, they can't put the whole neighborhood in prison, and in Ville-aux-Fayes and in the old lords there are people who are willing to take our part."

"That's true," said Courtecuisse; "no one complains but the shopman; Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles and the others are satisfied. And only to think that, if this cuirassier had only had the courage to get himself killed like the rest, I might still be living at my Avonne gate; and now he has upset everything, until I don't know myself."

"They will not send out the troops for a bourgeois like that, who has got himself disliked by every one in the country," said Godain. "It is his own fault. He wants to upset everything here, and overturn everybody; the Government will tell him to hold his tongue."

"The Government never says anything else; it can't, the poor Government," said Fourchon, seized with a sudden tenderness for the Government; "I pity it, the good Government. It is unfortunate; it is penniless, like us, and that is hard for a Government that has to earn its own living. Ah! if I were the Government!"

"But," exclaimed Courtecuisse, "they told me at Ville-aux-Fayes that Monsieur de Ronquerolles had spoken in the Assembly of our rights."

"That was in Monsieur Rigou's journal," said Vaudoyer, who knew how to read and write, in his quality of former garde-champetre. "I read it."

In spite of his pretended tenderness, old Fourchon, like many of the lower class whose faculties are stimulated by drunkenness, followed with an intelligent ear and an attentive eye this discussion, which was made a singular one by reason of the many side remarks. Suddenly he rose and took up his position in the middle of the room.

"Listen to the old one; he's drunk," said Tonsard. "He has a double share of malice; he has his own, and that of the wine too."

"My children," said Fourchon, "don't butt against anything; you are too weak. Take my advice, and go at it sideways. Play dead; play sleeping dogs. The little lady is already scared. We will soon drive her out. She will leave the country, and if she goes, the shopman goes too, for he

is dead in love with her. That's the plan. But to hasten their departure, my advice is to take away from them their counsel, their strength, our spy, our master."

"And who is that?"

"That damned curé," replied Tonsard; "he comes here to hunt for sins and to stir up trouble."

"That's true!" cried Vaudoyer; "we were happy without the curé. We must get rid of him; he is the enemy."

"Shall we glean, or shall we not glean?" said Bonnebault. "I don't care anything about your abbé, not I! I belong to Conches, and we have no curé there to disturb our consciences."

"Wait," said Vaudoyer. "Rigou, who knows all about the law, ought to know whether the shopman can forbid us the gleaning, and he will tell us whether we are right. If the shopman is right, then, as the old man says, we will take him sideways."

"There will be blood spilled," said Nicolas darkly, as he rose after drinking a whole bottle of wine which Catherine had given him to keep him from talking. "If you will take my advice, we will get rid of Michaud. But you are all cowards."

"Not I," said Bonnebault. "If you are my friends, and will keep your mouths shut, I will take care of the shopman. What a pleasure it would be to put a bullet through him! I would be revenged then on all those cursed officers."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jean Louis Tonsard, who had followed Fourchon into the house.

This fellow, who had been for several months courting Rigou's pretty servant, was taking his father's place in trimming hedges and trees. As he went about to the different bourgeois houses he talked with masters and men, and collected ideas which made of him the man of resource, the plotter of the family. It will be seen later that in paying his court to Rigou's servant, he was giving a proof of his sagacity.

"Well, prophet, what is the matter with you?" asked the innkeeper of his son.

"I say that you are playing right into the hands of the bourgeois," replied Jean Louis. "Frighten the people of les Aigues for the sake of maintaining your rights, if you will, but to drive them out of the country and force them to leave les Aigues, as the burgeois of the valley want them to do, is against our own interests. If you help to divide the great estates, where will there be any land to be divided at the next revolution? Then you will get land for nothing, as Rigou did; while if you put it into the mouths of the bourgeois now, they will spit it out again to you very much smaller and dearer; you will be working for them, like all who work for Rigou. Look at Courtecuisse."

This argument was too profound for the drunken listeners to seize it; for they all, except Courtecuisse, were saving up their money to have a share in the spoils of les Aigues. Thus they let Jean Louis talk, while they themselves followed the example of the Chamber of Deputies, and continued their own private conversations.

"Well, you will all be Rigou's tools," exclaimed Fourchon, who was the only one to understand his grandson.

Just then Langlumé, the miller of les Aigues, passed, and Madame Tonsard hailed him.

"Is it true, monsieur le deputé," she asked, "that they have forbidden the gleaning?"

Langlumé, a jovial little man, with a face whitened by flour, dressed in a whitey gray suit, came up the steps, and at once the peasants assumed their serious demeanor.

"Well, yes, and no. The needy will glean; but the measures that they are taking will be very advantageous to you."

"How?" asked Godain.

"If they keep all the poor people from gleaning here," replied the miller, winking after the Norman fashion, "there is nothing to prevent you from going elsewhere, unless all the mayors follow the example of the mayor of Blangy."

"Then it is true?" asked Tonsard, threateningly.

"I am going back to Conches to tell the friends," said Bonnebault, putting his cap on his ear and twirling his hazel stick.

And the beau of the valley went away, whistling the air of the soldier's song :

"You who know the hussars of the guard,
Do you know the trombone of the regiment?"

"See here, Marie ! he is taking a queer road to go to Conches," cried old Mother Tonsard to her granddaughter.

"He is going to see Aglae," exclaimed Marie, bounding to the door ; "I'll have to give that girl a good thrashing ! "

"Come, Vaudoyer," said Tonsard, "go and see Rigou ; then we shall know what to do. He is our oracle, and his advice will cost nothing."

"Another folly," said Jean Louis in a low tone. "He betrays every one ; as Annette has told me, he is more dangerous than if he got angry."

"I want you to be prudent," added Langlumé, "for the general has gone to the prefecture on account of your misdeeds, and Sibilet said that he had sworn on his honor to go as far as Paris and speak to the chancellor of France, or to the king, or the whole shopful, if necessary, to have his rights with his peasants."

"His peasants ! " they exclaimed.

"So we do not belong to ourselves any longer ! "

Whereupon Vaudoyer went out to find the former mayor.

Langlumé, who had already gone out, turned to say :

"You heap of idleness, have you any incomes to make you your own masters?"

Although this was said laughingly, it was understood, as a horse understands a lash of the whip.

XIII.

THE COUNTRY USURER.

STRATEGICALLY, Rigou was at Blangy in the position of an advance sentinel in war ; he watched over les Aigues, and did it well. The police never have spies that can compare with those who serve hate.

When the general first arrived at les Aigues, Rigou doubtless had some design upon him which was frustrated by his marriage with a Troisville, for at that time he had seemed to want to protect the great landowner. His intentions had then been so evident that Gaubertin had judged it necessary to initiate him into the conspiracy which had been formed against les Aigues. Before accepting a part in the play, Rigou wished, according to his own expression, to put the general at the foot of the wall.

When the comtesse was fairly installed at the chateau, one day a little basket carriage, painted green, entered the grand courtyard of les Aigues. The mayor, with his wife, got out, and came up to the house. Rigou saw the comtesse at a window. She was devoted to the bishop, to religion and to the Abbé Brossette, who hastened to warn her against her enemy ; and the comtesse sent word by Francois that "Madame was out."

This insulting message, worthy of a woman who had been born in Russia, made the visitor's face turn yellow. If the comtesse had had the curiosity to see the man of whom the curé had said : "He is as one of the damned, who, to refresh himself, plunges into iniquity as into a bath," perhaps she would have avoided establishing between the mayor and the chateau that cold and calculating hatred which the liberals felt for the royalists, augmented as it was by the further incitements of contiguity of neighborhood in the country, where the memory of a wound to self-love is continually revived.

A few details concerning this man and his morals will not only serve to explain his participation in the conspiracy called "the great affair" by his two associates, but will paint a type which is very curious, that of one of those rural existences peculiar to France, which have hitherto been drawn by no pencil. Moreover, nothing about this man is insignificant, whether it be his house, his method of blowing the fire, or his way of eating ; his manners and opinions will be a powerful factor in the history of this valley. This renegade explains the utility of democracy ; he is at once the theory and

the practice, the alpha and omega, the *summum*.

Perhaps the reader will remember certain masters in avarice who have been described in former scenes of this work? In the first place, the provincial miser, Père Grandet, of Saumur, who was miserly as a tiger is cruel; then Gobseck the usurer, the Jesuit of gold, relishing only its power, and delighting in the tears of misfortune, knowing what caused them; then the Baron de Nucingen, who elevated fraudulent transactions in money to the height of politics. The reader will also remember the portrait of the miserly servant, old Hochon, of Issoudon, and that other miser through family interest, little La Baudraye, of Sancerre. Well, human sentiments, and particularly those of avarice, have so many different shades in the different centers of our society, that one more miser remains upon the boards of the theater of the study of morals. There remains Rigou. He was the type of the egotistic miser, full of tenderness for his own pleasures, but hard and cold toward others; he was the ecclesiastical miser, the monk who had remained a monk in order that he might express the juice of the citron called good living, and who had ceased to be a monk in order that he might catch at the public money. And in the first place, let us explain the continued happiness which he derived from sleeping beneath his own roof.

Blangy, composed of the sixty houses described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan, is built on rising ground, at the left of the Thune. As all the houses have gardens, the effect of the village is charming. Some of the houses are situated beside the stream. At the summit of the hill is the church, formerly flanked by its presbytery, and surrounded by its cemetery, as in so many villages.

The sacrilegious Rigou had not failed to buy this presbytery, which had been built by the good Catholic, Mademoiselle Choin, on land bought by her for that purpose. A terraced garden, from which a view was obtained of the estates of Blangy, Soulanges and Cerneux, situated between the two seigneurial parks, separated this ancient presbytery from the church. On the opposite side was a meadow which had been bought by the last curé a short time before his death, and surrounded with walls by the defiant Rigou.

The mayor had refused to restore this presbytery to its original use, and the commune had been obliged to buy a peasant's house situated near the church; it was necessary to spend five thousand francs to enlarge it, restore it, and add a garden to it, whose wall divided it from the sacristy, so that communication was established, as formerly, between the curé's residence and the church.

These two houses, built on a line with the church, to which they seemed to belong by means of their gardens, looked out upon an open space planted with trees, which formed the principal square of Blangy, for opposite the new curé the comte had constructed a building which was destined to hold the mayor's office, the quarters of the garde-champetre, and the school of brethren of the Christian Doctrine so vainly solicited by the Abbé Brossette.

Thus the houses of the former monk and the young curé were not only both united and divided by the church, but they overlookod each other. The whole village spied upon the Abbé Brossette. The Grande-Rue, which began at the Thune, wound up to the church. Vineyards and peasants' gardens, and a little wood, crowned the hill of Blangy.

Rigou's house, the most beautiful in the village, was built of large round stones, peculiar to Burgundy, held in a yellow mortar, roughly put on with the trowel, which produced undulations pierced here and there by the stones, which were for the most part black. A band of mortar, in which not a stone was to be seen, outlined at each window a frame which time had streaked with fine and capricious fissures, such as are often seen on old ceilings. The shutters, roughly made, were painted a solid dragon-green. Some flat mosses grew between the slates on the roof. It was the type of a Burgundian house; travelers can see

thousands of similar ones in that part of France.

A private door opened upon a corridor, halfway down which was the well of the wooden staircase. On entering, one saw the door of a large hall with three windows, overlooking the square. The kitchen, built under the staircase, got its light from the court, which was pebbled carefully, and which was entered by a porte-cochere. These rooms composed the ground floor.

The first floor contained three rooms, and there was a little room in the roof.

A woodshed, a coach-house and a stable adjoined the kitchen, and made the other side of the square. Above these lightly built constructions were the granary, a fruit-room, and a servant's room.

A poultry-yard, a stable and some pigsties were opposite the house.

The garden, which was about an acre in extent, and was inclosed by walls, was a typical curé's garden, full of espaliers, fruit trees, trellises, alleys sanded and bordered with box, and vegetable beds enriched with manure from the stables. Above the house was a second inclosure, planted with trees, inclosed with hedges, and large enough to pasture two cows at once.

Inside the house the hall was paneled and hung with old tapestries. The walnut-wood furniture, brown with old age, and covered with needlework tapestry, harmonized with the wooden paneling and with the floor, which was also of wood. The ceiling had three projecting beams, which were painted; the space between them was ceiled. The chimney-piece, of walnut wood, surmounted by a glass in a grotesque frame, had no other ornament than two copper eggs upon a marble base which separated in the middle; the upper half turned back, and showed a candlestick.

These candlesticks with two ends, ornamented with chains, an invention of the reign of Louis XV., were becoming rare. A common, but excellent clock stood on a green and gold bracket against the wall opposite the windows. Curtains, which grated upon their iron rods, were fifty years old; their material, of cotton in squares like mattresses, alternately red and white, came from the Indies. A sideboard and a dining-table completed the furnishing, which was cared for with the utmost neatness.

Beside the chimney-piece was an immense easy-chair, Rigou's special seat. In the corner, above the little *bonheur-du-jour* which served him for a secretary, hanging on a common nail, was a pair of bellows, the origin of Rigou's fortune.

From this concise description, whose style rivals that of auction handbills, it is easy to see that the two rooms of Monsieur and Madame Rigou must have contained only the strictest necessaries; but this parsimony did not prevent the articles from being of good material. The most exacting of ladies would have been perfectly comfortable in a bed like that of Rigou, which was composed of an excellent mattress, sheets of fine linen, and heaped up with a down covering which had been purchased for some abbé by a devotee, and guarded from draughts by good curtains. And it was the same with everything, as will be seen.

In the first place, the miser had reduced his wife, who could neither read, write, nor do accounts, to a state of the most absolute obedience. After having ruled her deceased master, the poor creature ended by being the servant of her own husband, doing his cooking and washing, receiving only a little help from a very pretty girl named Annette, who was nineteen years old, and as much afraid of Rigou as her mistress, and who earned thirty francs a year.

Tall, wrinkled and thin, Madame Rigou, a woman with a yellow face, colored with red on the cheekbones, with her head always wrapped in a handkerchief, and wearing the same skirt all the year round, did not leave her home two hours a month, and kept her activity by means of the care which a devoted servant gives to a house. The cleverest observer would have found no trace of the magnificent figure, the freshness of a Rubens, the splendid *embonpoint*, the superb teeth and the virgin's eyes which had once rec-

ommended the young girl to the notice of the curé Niseron. The birth of her only daughter, Madame Soudry the younger, had decimated her teeth, dimmed her eyes, and blighted her complexion. It seemed as if the finger of God had been laid upon the priest's wife. Like all rich housekeepers in the country, she liked to see her wardrobes full of silk dresses, either in the piece or newly made up; and she had laces and jewels which could have no possible use except to make Rigou's young servants commit the sin of envy and wish that she was dead. She was one of those beings, half animal and half woman, who seem to live instinctively. Since she had become uninteresting, the legacy of the late curé would have been inexplicable except for the curious circumstance which prompted it, and which we relate for the benefit of the immense tribe of heirs.

Madame Niseron, the wife of the old sexton, overwhelmed her husband's uncle with attentions; for the inheritance of the property of an old man of seventy-two, estimated to be over forty thousand livres, would put the family of the sole heir in a position of comfort which was impatiently awaited by the late Madame Niseron. Besides her son, she had a charming little girl, full of fun, and innocent, one of those creatures who seem born only to fade away, for she died at the age of fourteen. She was the petted darling of the presbytery, and she was as much at home in her granduncle the curé's house as in her own; she went there in fair weather and foul, and was very fond of Mademoiselle Arsène, the pretty servant whom her uncle took into his house in 1789, by favor of the license introduced into the ecclesiastical discipline by the first revolutionary storms.

In 1791, at the time the curé Niseron offered an asylum to Rigou and his brother Jean, the child played an innocent little joke. While she was enjoying with Arsène and the other children the game which consists in concealing, each in his turn, an object for which the others search, to cries of "You are burning!" or "You are freezing!" according to whether they approach or recede from the sought-for object, the little Genevieve conceived the idea of hiding in Arsène's bed the bellows which hung in the hall. The bellows could not be found, and the game ceased. Genevieve, taken away by her mother, forgot to return the bellows to its place. Arsène and her aunt, the old housekeeper, sought for the bellows for a week, and then they looked no longer, for they found something to take its place; the old curé blew his fire with an air cane, made in the days when air canes were fashionable. Finally, one evening, a month before her death, the housekeeper, after a dinner at which the Abbé Mouchon, the Niseron family and the curé of Soulanges had been present, began anew her jeremiads concerning the bellows, for she was not able to explain their disappearance.

"Why! they have been in Arsène's bed for the last fortnight," said the little Genevieve, laughing heartily; "if the great lazy thing had made her bed she would have found them."

Everybody began to laugh, but to the laughter succeeded the most profound silence.

"There is nothing to laugh at in that," said the housekeeper; "since I have been ill, Arsène has watched with me at night."

In spite of this explanation the Curé Niseron threw upon Madame Niseron and her husband the thunder-wielding look of a priest who suspects a conspiracy. The housekeeper died. Rigou knew so well how to make the most of the curé's hate that the Abbé Niseron disinherited François Niseron in favor of Arsène Pichard.

In 1823 Rigou still, out of gratitude, used the air-cane to blow the fire, and left the bellows on the nail.

Madame Niseron, who loved her daughter passionately, did not long survive her; mother and daughter both died in 1794. When the curé died Rigou occupied himself with Arsène's affairs, and took her for his wife.

The former brother proselyte of the abbe, who was attached to Rigou as a dog to his master, became at once the

groom, the gardener, the herdsman, the valet and the steward of this sensual Harpagon.

Arsène Rigou, who in 1821 married without a dowry the prosecuting attorney, had her mother's beauty and her father's crafty mind.

Rigou was at that time sixty-seven years old, and he had not been ill for thirty years; nothing seemed to touch his almost insolent health. He was tall and dry, with a brown circle around his eyes; his eyelids were almost black; when he exposed his wrinkled red neck in the morning, he looked like a condor, all the more because his nose, which was very long, and thin at the end, helped this resemblance by its bright red color. His head, which was half bald, would have frightened connoisseurs by the shape of his skull, which was like an ass's backbone—the index of a despotic will. His gray eyes, almost veiled behind their streaked lids, were made for hypocrisy. Two locks of an undecided color, the hairs of which were so thin that they did not conceal the skin, floated above his ears, which were large, high, and without rims; a feature which reveals cruelty of the moral order, when it does not denote folly. The mouth, which was very wide, with thin lips, denoted a man who liked to eat and drink much, by a fall at the corners like two commas, where the juice or the saliva ran out when he ate or talked. Heliogabalus must have been like this.

His unvarying costume consisted of a long blue redingote with a military collar, a black cravat, pantaloons, and a large waistcoat of black cloth. His thick-soled shoes were garnished outside with nails, and inside with a woolen lining knitted by his wife on winter evenings. Annette and her mistress also knit the master's stockings.

Rigou was named Gregoire, and his friends were in the habit of making a play upon his name by calling him Grigou (G. Rigou).

Although this sketch describes his character, no one would ever imagine how far, without opposition and in solitude, the former Benedictine had carried the science of egotism, of good cheer, and of all kinds of self-indulgence. He ate alone, waited on by his wife and Annette, who ate after him, with Jean, in the kitchen, while he digested his dinner, sipped his wine, and read the "news." In the country, newspapers are never known by their proper names; they are always called "the news."

The dinner, like the breakfast and the supper, was always composed of the nicest materials, and cooked with that science which distinguishes a curé's housekeeper from all other cooks. Madame Rigou made their own butter twice a week. Cream was a component part of all their sauces. The vegetables came freshly picked from their frames to the saucepan. The Parisians, who are accustomed to eat salads and vegetables which accomplish a second vegetation from exposure to the sun, the infection of the streets, and fermentation in the shops, and which have been watered by the market-women, to give them a deceitful freshness, know nothing about the exquisite flavor of these products to which Nature has confided virtues, fugitive yet powerful, when they are eaten, as it were, alive.

The butcher from Soulanges brought his best meat, under penalty of losing the custom of the redoutable Rigou. The poultry, raised on the premises, was, of course, of the finest quality.

This hypocritical care distinguished everything intended for Rigou. While his slippers were of coarse leather, they were lined with good lamb's wool. While his coat was of coarse cloth, it did not touch his skin, for his shirt, washed and ironed at home, had been spun by the cleverest fingers of La Frise. His wife, Annette and Jean drank the wine of the country, which came from Rigou's own vineyard; but in his particular cellar, the finest wines of Burgundy were side by side with those of Bordeaux, Champagne, Roussillon, the Rhone, and Spain, all bought ten years in advance, and always bottled by Brother Jean. The liquors coming from the Isles were from Madame Amphoux; the usurer had ac-

quired enough of them to last him his life time, from the sale of a castle in Burgundy.

Rigou ate and drank like Louis XIV., one of the greatest known consumers. He was discreet and clever in his secret prodigality, he disputed his smallest bargains as only people of the church know how to dispute them. Instead of taking infinite precautions against being cheated, the wily monk kept samples, and had written agreements; but if his wine or his provisions came from a distance, he gave warning that at the slightest fault in quality, he should refuse to accept them.

Jean, the director of the fruit-room, was trained to know how to preserve in their freshness the finest fruits known in the department. Rigou ate pears, apples, and sometimes grapes at Easter.

Never was a prophet more blindly obeyed than was Rigou in his own house, in his least caprice. The movement of his great black eyebrows made his wife, Annette and Jean mortally uneasy; he held his three slaves by the minute multiplicity of their duties, which were like a chain. Every moment these poor people were beneath the lash of a required duty, and of his watchfulness; but they finally found a kind of pleasure in the accomplishment of these constant tasks, and did not grow weary of them. The sole object of the care and thoughts of all three was the well-being of this man.

Since 1795, Annette was the tenth pretty maid who had been employed by Rigou, who intended to strew his way to the tomb with these relays of young girls. Annette had come at the age of sixteen, and at nineteen she was to go away. Each one of them, chosen from Auxerre, Clamecy and in the Morvan, were attracted by the promise of a fine settlement in life; but Madame Rigou obstinately persisted in living. And always, at the end of three years, a quarrel, brought on by the insolence of the servant toward her poor mistress, necessitated her removal.

Annette, a chef d'œuvre of fine, piquant beauty, deserved the crown of a duchess. She was not wanting in wit. Rigou knew nothing of the understanding between her and Jean Louis Tonsard, which proved that he allowed himself to be taken in by the pretty girl, the only one to whom ambition had suggested flattery as a means of blinding his lynx-like eyes.

This exquisite life, this life comparable to that of Bouret, cost him almost nothing. Thanks to his white slaves, Rigou could cut and gather in his fagots, his hay and his wheat. To peasants, manual labor is a very little thing, particularly in consideration of a promise of more time given for payment of interest. Rigou, while demanding little premiums on each month's delay, exacted from his debtors manual service, drudgery to which they submitted, thinking they gave nothing because it did not come out of their pocket. Rigou sometimes received thus more than the face value of the debt.

Deep as a monk, silent as a Benedictine at work upon history, wily as a priest, deceitful, like all misers, keeping always within the limits of the law, this man might have been Tiberius at Rome, Richelieu under Louis XIII., or Fouché, if he had had the ambition to go to the Convention; but he was wise enough to be a Lucullus without fasting, a voluptuous miser. To occupy his mind, he played with a hatred made out of whole cloth. He harassed the Comte de Montcornet. He made the peasants move by a play of concealed threads, whose management amused him like a game of chess where the pawns were living men, where the knights rode horseback, where fools like Fourchon talked, where the feudal castles shone in the sun, and where the queen maliciously checked the king.

Every day when he rose, this man saw from his window the proud edifice of les Aigues, the chimneys of the lodges, and the superb gates, and he said to himself: "All this will fall! I will dry up these brooks; I will lay low these woods." He had both his great and his little victims. While he meditated the ruin of the chateau, he flattered himself by thinking that he would kill the Abbé Brossette by pin-thrusts.

To finish the portrait of this ex-monk, it will suffice to say that he went to mass, regretting that his wife still lived, and expressing a desire to become reconciled with the Church as soon as he should become a widower. He saluted the Abbé Brossette with deference, when he met him, and spoke gently to him, without passion. Usually, all those who belong to the Church, or who have gone out from it, have an insect-like patience; they owe it to the obligation to preserve decorum, an education which, from the age of twenty, is wanting to the majority of Frenchmen, even to those who believe themselves to be well brought up. All the monks whom the Revolution drove from their monasteries and who went into business have shown, by their coldness and reserve, the superiority which the ecclesiastical discipline gives to all the children of the Church, even to those who desert it.

Enlightened in 1792 by the affair of the will, Gaubertin at length understood the cunning hidden beneath the face of the clever hypocrite; so he made himself his accomplice, and worshiped with him before the golden calf. When the house of Leclercq was founded, he told Rigou to put fifty thousand francs into it, and he guaranteed them to him. Rigou was all the more desirable as a sleeping partner, since he allowed his principal and interest to remain and accumulate. At this time Rigou's interest in the concern amounted to more than a hundred thousand francs, although, in 1816, he had taken out the sum of one hundred and eighty thousand francs to place it in the funds, from which investment he derived an income of seventeen thousand francs. Lupin knew of a hundred and fifty thousand francs which Rigou had in mortgages of small sums on good property. Ostensibly Rigou had about forty thousand francs of net income from landed property. But as for his savings, they were an unknown quantity which no rule of calculation could determine, just as the devil alone knew of the schemes which he plotted with Langlumé.

This terrible usurer, who counted upon at least twenty years more of life, had invented fixed rules of procedure. He never lent to a peasant who had not at least six acres, and who had not paid half of the purchase money. It will be seen that Rigou knew well the defects of the law of dispossession, as applied to small holdings, and the danger to the Treasury and to property-holders of too great a division of land.

How can a peasant be sued for the value of one furrow, when he only owns five? The foresight of private interest will always distance by twenty-five years that of an assembly of legislators. What a lesson for a country! The law will always proceed from one vast brain, one man of genius, and not from nine hundred intelligences, which, however great they may be, are belittled by being in a crowd. Does not Rigou's law contain, in effect, the principle of that which has yet to be found, to stop the nonsensical spectacle of property divided into halves, thirds, quarters, and tenths of a hundred, as in the commune of Argenteuil, where there are thirty thousand divisions of land?

Such operations required an amount of trickery as extended as that which weighed upon this arrondissement. Besides, as Rigou caused Lupin to draw at least a third of the deeds which annually passed through his hands, he found a devoted ally in the notary of Soulanges. The shark could thus include in the contract of the loan, which was always witnessed by the wife of the borrower when he was married, the sum to which the illegal interest amounted. The peasant, delighted to have only five per cent to pay annually, during the duration of the loan, always hoped to extricate himself from the debt by means of abnormal work, or by improvements which should increase the returns.

Hence came the deceitful marvels born of what imbecile economists call "small farming," the result of a false policy by which we are obliged to carry French money to Germany to buy the horses which our own country no longer furnishes, a mistake which will diminish to such an extent the raising of horned cat-

tle that meat will soon be unattainable not only by the people, but by the middle class also.

Thus, between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, many a man's toil went for Rigou, who was respected by all, while the work for which the general, the only one who scattered any money through the neighborhood, paid high prices, brought him nothing but curses and the hatred of the poor for the rich man. Such facts would be inexplicable without a glance at the middle classes. Fourchon was right; the bourgeois were taking the place of the nobles. These small proprietors, of whom Courtecuisse was a type, were subject to mortmain to the Tiberius of the valley of the Avonne, just as in Paris the penniless manufacturers are the peasants of the banking system.

Soudry followed Rigou's example, from Soulanges to five leagues beyond Ville-aux-Fayes. The two usurers shared the arrondissement.

Gaubertin, whose rapacity was exercised in a higher sphere, not only did not compete with his associates, but he prevented other capital in Ville-aux-Fayes from taking the same fruitful road. It will thus be easy to see what an influence this triumvirate of Rigou, Soudry and Gaubertin would have at elections, upon electors whose fortunes depended upon their good-will.

Hate, intelligence and fortune composed the three sides of the terrible triangle described by the closest enemy to les Aigues, the spy upon the general, in constant communication with sixty or eighty small proprietors, relatives or allies of the peasants, who feared him as men always fear a creditor.

Rigou was the outgrowth of Tonsard; the one lived upon natural, and the other upon legal, thefts. Both were fond of good living; it was the same nature under two aspects, the one natural, and the other sharpened by a cloister education.

When Vaudoyer left the cabaret of the Grand-I-vert to consult the ex-mayor, it was about four o'clock. This was Rigou's dinner-hour.

When he found the private door shut, Vaudoyer looked through the curtains, and called:

"Monsieur Rigou, it is I, Vaudoyer."

Jean came out at the porte-cochère, and motioned to Vaudoyer to enter, saying:

"Come this way; monsieur has company."

The company was Sibilet, who, under pretext of coming to an understanding with Rigou concerning the verdict which Brunet had just brought, was talking with him upon a very different subject. He had found the usurer finishing his dessert.

On a square table, covered with dazzlingly white linen (for, regardless of the work he gave his wife and Annette, Rigou insisted upon having clean linen every day), the steward saw a dish of strawberries, apricots, peaches, figs and almonds, all the fruits of the season in profusion, served on plates of white china, upon grape leaves, almost as daintily as at les Aigues.

When he saw Sibilet, Rigou told him to push the bolts of the inner doors, which were made for each outer door, to protect from the cold as well as to deaden sounds, and asked him what important business brought him in broad day-light, when it was so much safer to confer by night.

"The shopman talks of going to Paris to see the keeper of the seals; he is capable of doing you much harm; of asking for the removal of your son-in-law, of the judges of Ville-aux-Fayes, and of the president, particularly when he reads the verdict which has just been given in your favor. He is turning refractory; he is cunning; he has an adviser in the Abbé Brossette who is capable of tilting with you and Gaubertin. The priests are powerful. The bishop likes the Abbé Brossette. Madame la Comtesse has spoken of going to see her cousin, the prefect, the Comte de Castéran, about Nicolas. Michaud is beginning to understand our little game."

"You are afraid," said the usurer, softly, casting a look upon Sibilet which suspicion rendered less impassive than usual,

and which was terrible. "You are calculating whether it would not be better worth your while to come out on the general's side."

"I don't see, when you shall have divided les Aigues, where I am to find my four thousand francs to invest every year, honestly, as I have done for the last five years," replied Sibilet, shortly. "Monsieur Gaubertin has made me some very fine promises; but the crisis is approaching; there is certainly going to be fighting. To promise and to keep are two different things, after the victory has been won."

"I will speak to him," replied Rigou, tranquilly. "In the meantime, this is what I should reply to you, if I were in his place: 'For the last five years, you have taken four thousand francs to Monsieur Rigou every year, and the worthy man has given you seven and a half per cent, which gives you now an account of twenty-seven thousand francs, because of the accumulation of interest; but, as there exists a deed, under private signature, between yourself and Rigou, the steward of les Aigues will be sent away on the day when the Abbé Brossette shall put this deed before the shopman, particularly after an anonymous letter which shall tell him of your double-dealing. You would therefore do better to keep with us, without asking for your pay in advance, for Monsieur Rigou, who is not legally bound to give you seven and a half per cent, would make you an offer of your twenty thousand francs; and before you could touch the money, your suit, drawn out by means of chicanery, would be judged by the court of Ville-aux-Fayes. If you behave wisely, when Monsieur Rigou shall become proprietor of your tribunal at les Aigues, you will be able to go on with about thirty thousand francs, and thirty thousand others which Rigou might intrust to you, which would be all the more advantageous since the peasants will rush for the estate of les Aigues, which will be divided into little pieces, after the manner of poverty in the world.' That is what Monsieur Gaubertin might say to you; but I have nothing at all to say; it does not concern me. Gaubertin and I have our own complaint to make of this son of the people who is abusing his own father, and we are pursuing our own idea. Gaubertin may need you, but I need no one, for everybody is devoted to me. As for the keeper of the seals, he is often changed, while we are always here."

"Then you knew all about it," said Sibilet, who felt like a donkey beneath a pack saddle.

"All about what?" asked Rigou, slyly.

"About what the shopman will do," replied the steward humbly; "he went to the prefecture in a rage."

"Let him go! If the Montcornets did not use wheels, what would become of the coachmakers?"

"I will bring you three thousand francs this evening at eleven o'clock," said Sibilet; "but you ought to do me a good turn by giving up to me some of your maturing mortgages, the kind that will be worth some good plots of ground to me."

"I have the one belonging to Courtecuisse, and I want to treat him gently, for he is the best shot in the department; in transferring it to you, you will seem to be harassing him on the shopman's account, and that will be striking two blows with one stone. He would be capable of anything if he found himself lower than Fourchon. Courtecuisse has ruined himself on La Bachelerie. He has improved the land, and put walls for the fruit to train against. The little property must be worth four thousand francs, and the comte would gladly give you that for the three acres which fit in with his own land. If Courtecuisse had not been so idle, he would have been able to pay his interest with game killed on the place."

"Well, transfer it to me, and I will get my butter out of it, and I shall have the house and garden for nothing. The comte wil buy the three acres."

"What part of it will you give me?"

"Good heavens! you would draw milk from an ox!" exclaimed Sibilet; "and after I have just got from the shopman the order to regulate the gleaning according to the law."

"Did you get that, my boy?" said Rigou, who, several days before, had suggested the idea to Sibilet, telling him to advise the general to that effect. "We have him; he is lost. But it is not enough to hold him by one string; we must wind him with cords like a roll of tobacco. Draw the bolts, my good fellow; tell my wife to bring the coffee and liquors, and tell Jean to harness up. I am going to Soulanges. Good-by until this evening. How do you do, Vaudoyer," he added, as his former garde-champetre entered. "Well, what is it?"

Vaudoyer related all that had just taken place at the carabet, and asked Rigou's opinion as to the legality of the steps meditated by the general.

"He has the right," replied Rigou, curtly. "We have a hard lord. The Abbé Brossette is malicious; he suggests all these measures because you do not go to mass, you heap of unbelievers! I go; there is a God, you know. If you endure everything, the shopman will keep on encroaching."

"Well, we shall glean," said Vaudoyer, with the resolute accent which distinguishes the Burgundian.

"Without any certificate of pauperism?" asked the usurer. "They say that he has gone to the perfecture to ask for troops, to keep you in order."

"We will glean as we have always done," repeated Vaudoyer.

"Glean, then! Monsieur Sarcus will judge whether you are right," said the usurer, as if he were promising the gleaners the protection of the justice of the peace.

"We will glean, and we will be in force! or Burgundy will be no longer Burgundy," said Vaudoyer. "If the gendarmes have sabers, we have scythes, and we will see!"

At half past four the great green gate of the old presbytery turned upon its hinges, and the bay horse, led by the bridle by Jean, turned toward the square. Madame Rigou and Annette, who had just come out of the private door, looked at the little wicker carriage, painted green, with its leather hood, where the master was comfortably seated on his soft cushions.

"Do not be late home, monsieur," said Annette, making a little face.

The villagers, who were already aware of the threatening steps that the mayor was about to take, came to their doors or stopped in the street when they saw Rigou, thinking that he was on his way to Soulanges to defend them.

"Well, Madame Courtecuisse, our ex-mayor is probably on his way to defend us," said an old woman who was knitting, and who was much interested in the question of forest depredations, since her husband sold the fagots that he stole from Soulanges.

"Yes, his heart aches for what has happened; he is as sorry about it as all the rest of you," replied the poor woman, who trembled at the name of her creditor, and who praised him through very fear.

"To say nothing of the shameful way they have treated him. Good-day, Monsieur Rigou," she added, for Rigou had bowed to her as well as to his debtor.

When the usurer crossed the Thune, which was fordable at all times, Tonsard, who had come out of his cabaret, spoke to him on the road.

"Well, Père Rigou," he said, "does the shopman want us to be his dogs?"

"We will see about that," replied the usurer, whipping up his horse.

"He will know how to defend us," said Tonsard to a group of women and children who gathered around him.

"He is thinking as much about you as an innkeeper thinks of his gudgeons when he is getting his chickens ready to fry," returned Fourchon.

"Take the clapper out of your throat when you are drunk," said Mouche, pulling the old man by his blouse, and making him fall upon the bank beneath a poplar. "If that mastiff of a monk heard that, you would not sell your stories to him any more at such a price."

Rigou was hurrying to Soulanges, on account of the important news brought to him by the steward of les Aigues, which seemed to him to menace the secret coalition of the bourgeois of the Avonne.

XIV.

THE FIRST SOCIETY OF SOULANGES.

ABOUT six kilometers from Blangy, to speak in round numbers, and at an equal distance from Ville-aux-Fayes, lies the little town of Soulanges, surnamed la Jolie. It is built in the form of an amphitheater, on an elevation, a branch of a chain of hills parallel to the one at the base of which runs the Avonne.

At the foot of this elevation the Thune flows over a clay bottom for a space of about sixty acres, at the end of which the mills of Soulanges, built on several islands, form a group as graceful as any landscape architect could devise. After watering the park of Soulanges, where it supplies beautiful rivers and artificial lakes, the Thune empties into the Avonne through a magnificent channel.

The chateau of Soulanges, rebuilt under Louis XIV., from designs by Mansard, is one of the most beautiful in Burgundy, and faces the town. Thus Soulanges and the castle each have a beautiful view. The high-road winds between the town and the pond, rather pretentiously called by the country people the Lake of Soulanges.

The little town presents one of those compositions, so rare in France, where French prettiness is absolutely missing. The prettiness of Switzerland is there, as Blondet said in his letter; the prettiness of the neighborhood of Neufchatel. The bright vineyards which form a belt for Soulanges complete this resemblance, which does not include the neighborhood of the Jura and the Alps. The streets, placed one above another on the hill, have few houses, for they all have gardens, which produce masses of verdure rarely seen in capitals. The blue or red roofs, mingled with flowers, trees, and trellised terraces, offer varied but harmonious aspects.

The church, an old one of the Middle Ages, built of stone, thanks to the munificence of the lords of Soulanges, who reserved first a chapel near the choir, and then a subterranean chapel, for their tomb, has for a portal, like that of Longjumeau, an immense arcade, fringed with flower-beds and ornamented with statues, and flanked by two pillars in niches terminating in spires. This door, which is so common in small churches of the Middle Ages which chance has preserved from the ravages of Calvinism, is crowned by a triglyph above which is a sculptured Virgin, holding the infant Jesus. The low sides are composed without of five arcades defined by stone ribs and lighted by glass windows. The apse rests on arched abutments that are worthy of a cathedral. The clock-tower, which is in a branch of the cross, is a square tower surmounted by a chime of bells. This church can be seen at a great distance, for it is at the top of the great square, at the foot of which passes the road.

The public square, which is of a good size, is bordered with original constructions, all of different periods. Many of them, half wood and half brick, whose timbers have a facing of slate, date back to the Middle Ages. Others, built of stone, and having a balcony, show the gable so dear to our ancestors, and date back to the twelfth century. Several attract attention by old projecting beams with grotesque figures whose projections form pent-houses, and which recall the time when the middle class was essentially commercial. The most magnificent is the old bailiwick, a house with a sculptured front, on a line with the church, with which it corresponds admirably. At its sale as national property, it was bought by the commune, which turned it into the mayor's house and courthouse, where Monsieur Sarcus had presided ever since the establishment of justices of the peace.

This slight sketch will permit a glance at the square of Soulanges, ornamented in the middle by a charming fountain brought from Italy, in 1520, by the Marshal de Soulanges, which would not have dishonored a great capital. A perpetual stream of water, supplied from a spring at the top of the hill, was distributed by four cupids in white marble, holding shells

in their hands and baskets of grapes on their heads.

Learned travelers who passed that way, if there ever were any after Blondet, might recognize the public square illustrated by Molière and by the Spanish theater, which reigned for so long on the French stage, and which will always prove that comedy was born in a warm country, where life is passed on the public square. The square at Soulanges still further resembles this classic square, always alike in all theaters, in that the first two streets, intersecting it just above the fountain, afford the exits so necessary to masters and valets, when they want to meet or escape each other. At the corner of one of these streets, which is called the Rue de la Fontaine, shines the coat of arms of Master Lupin. The houses of Sarcus, the tax-gatherer Guerbet, Brunet, registry clerk Gourdon and his brother the doctor, and old Monsieur Gendrin-Vattebled, the head keeper of the waters and forests, all kept in perfect order by their proprietors, stand around the square, which is the aristocratic part of Soulanges.

Madame Soudry's house—for the powerful individuality of Mademoiselle Laguerre's former waiting-maid had dominated the importance of the chief of the community — was entirely modern, and had been built by a rich wine merchant, a native of Soulanges, who, after having made his fortune at Paris, returned in 1793 to buy wheat for his birthplace. He was massacred as a monopolist by the populace, led on by a miserable mason, Godain's uncle, with whom he had had disputes relating to his ambitious buildings.

The settlement of this estate, which was eagerly disputed among the heirs, lingered along, until, in 1798, Soudry, on his return to Soulanges, was able to buy for a thousand crowns in specie the wine merchant's palace; and he at first leased it to the department for the headquarters of the gendarmerie. In 1811 Mademoiselle Cochet, whom Soudry consulted in everything, strongly opposed a renewal of the lease, finding their own house uninhabitable, as she said, in such close quarters to barracks. The town of Soulanges, aided by the Government, then built a house for the gendarmes, in a street at angles to the mayor's house. Then the brigadier swept his house and restored it to its primitive luster, which had been tarnished by the stable and the gendarmes.

This house, only one story high, with a roof pierced by mansard windows, had three fronts, one overlooking the square, one the lake, and one a garden. The fourth side overlooked a court which separated the Soudry's from the next house, which was occupied by a grocer named Vattebled, a man not in the first society, and the father of the beautiful Madame Plissoud, of whom we shall hear more later.

The façade looking out upon the lake was bordered by a garden terrace, with a wall of medium height, terminating in a stone balustrade, and running parallel with the high-road. The entrance to the garden was down this terrace, by means of a staircase, on each step of which was an orange tree, a pomegranate, a myrtle, or other ornamental tree; for these a hothouse was required, which was situated at the foot of the garden. From the square, the house was entered by means of a flight of several steps. According to the custom in small towns, the carriage gate, reserved for state occasions, for the master's horse, and for extraordinary arrivals, was rarely opened. The frequenters of the house, who usually came on foot, used the flight of steps.

The style of the house was plain. The different stories were indicated by lines; the windows were incased in frames alternately slender and strong, like those of the pavilions Gabriel and Perronnet on the Place Louis XV. These ornaments, in such a small town, gave a monumental appearance to this celebrated house.

Opposite, at the other angle of the square, was the famous Café de la Paix, whose peculiarities and renowned Tivoli will require later a more detailed description than that of the Soudry mansion.

Rigou rarely came to Soulanges, for every one went to him, the notary Lupin

as well as Gaubertin, and Soudry as well as Gendrin, so much was he feared. But it will be seen that every learned man, like the ex-monk, would have imitated Rigou's reserve, by means of the sketch, which will be necessary here, of persons of whom it is said in the country: "They are the first society of Soulanges."

Of all these figures, the most original one, as will be expected, was that of Madame Soudry, whose personality, to be well painted, requires the most minute brush.

Madame Soudry permitted herself "a suspicion of rouge," in imitation of Mademoiselle Laguerre; but this slight tint had changed, by force of habit, to patches of vermilion, so picturesquely called carriage wheels by our ancestors. The wrinkles of her face becoming deeper and more numerous, the mayor's wife thought she could fill them up with paint. Her forehead became too yellow, and as her temples reflected like a mirror, she put on a little white, and made the veinings of youth by light lines of blue. This painting gave an excessive vivacity to her tricky eyes, and her face would have looked very odd to a stranger; but as they were accustomed to this fictitious brilliancy, the society in which she moved thought her beautiful.

Her dress was always low in the neck, showing her back and her chest, which were whitened and varnished by the same processes employed upon her face; but fortunately, under pretext of exhibiting her magnificent lace, she kept these chemical products half concealed. She always wore whalebones in the body of her dress, whose point was very long; and the waist was trimmed everywhere with knots of ribbon. Her skirt always creaked, so much did the silk and the furbelows abound.

This attire, which deserves the name of apparel, a word which will soon be inexplicable, was in the evening composed of the most expensive damask; for Madame Soudry possessed countless habiliments, each one costlier than the other, comprising the whole of the immense and splendid wardrobe of Mademoiselle Laguerre, and all made over by her in the latest fashion of 1808. The hair of her blonde wig, crimped and powdered, seemed to lift up her superb cap with its bows of cherry-red satin, to match the ribbons of her trimmings.

If you will imagine, beneath this ultra-coquettish cap, a monkey's face of extreme ugliness, in which the flat nose, as fleshless as that of Death, is separated, by a wide margin of hairy lip, from a mouth with false teeth, where the sounds are mingled as in hunting horns, you will with difficulty understand why the first society of the town, and all Soulanges, in fact, thought this woman beautiful, unless we recall the terse, *ex-professo* treatise which one of the most spirituel women of our own time has recently written on the art of making one's self beautiful, in Paris, by the accessories by which one is surrounded.

In the first place, Madame Soudry lived in the midst of magnificent gifts gathered together in her mistress's house, which the ex-Benedictine called *fructus belli*. Then she made something exclusive of her ugliness by exaggerating it, and by giving herself the air and the manner which belong only to Parisian women, whose secret is known even to the most vulgar among them, who are always more or less mimics. She laced to excess, she wore an enormous hoop, she wore diamonds in her ears, and her fingers were loaded with rings. And finally, above her corset, between two mounds of flesh well covered with pearl-white, shone a beetle made of two topazes with a diamond head, a present from her dear mistress, the fame of which had gone abroad throughout the department. Like her late mistress, she always wore her arms bare, and waved an ivory fan painted by Boucher, to which two little rose-diamonds served as rivets.

When she went out, Madame Soudry held over her head the true parasol of the eighteenth century, consisting of a stick at the top of which was a green umbrella with green fringe. When she walked about the terrace, a passer-by, looking at

her from a distance, would have believed he saw a Watteau figure.

In the salon, hung with red damask, with damask curtains lined with white silk, whose chimney-piece was ornamented with china images after the manner of the good time of Louis XV.—in this salon full of furniture of gilded wood with hind's feet, we can understand that the people of Soulanges might say of the mistress of the house: "The beautiful Madame Soudry!" Thus the house became the pride of this principal town of the canton.

If the first society of the little town believed in its queen, it was equally true that the queen believed in herself. By a phenomenon which is not rare, and which the vanity of the mother, like that of the author, accomplishes every moment before our eyes for literary works as well as for marriageable daughters, in seven years la Cochet had buried herself so well in madame, the mayor's wife, that she had not only succeeded in forgetting her former condition, but she actually believed herself to be a well-born woman. She remembered so well the toss of the head, the treble voice, the gestures and mannerisms of her former mistress, that she was able to reproduce her impertinence also. She knew her eighteenth century, and had her anecdotes of the great nobles and their relatives at the end of her tongue. This anteroom erudition gave her a style of conversation which made her seem very distinguished. And her soubrette wit passed for the finest intelligence. In morals, perhaps, she was not the real article; but, with savages, paste is as good as diamonds.

This woman found herself praised and worshiped, as formerly her mistress had been worshiped, by people of good society, who found a dinner at her house every day, if they liked, and coffee and liquors if they came to dessert, which they frequently did. No woman's head could have resisted the exhilaration of this continued incense. In the winter the salon was well warmed and lighted with candles, and filled with the richest of the bourgeois, who praised and made away with the fine liquors and excellent wines taken from dear mistress's cellar. Thus they and their wives enjoyed luxury, and at the same time economized coal and candles. And her praises were sung for five leagues around, and even as far as Ville-aux-Fayes.

"Madame Soudry does the honors of her house marvelously well," the people said, when they talked over the families in the neighborhood; "she keeps an open house, and makes everybody feel at home. She knows how to do the honors with her fortune. She knows how to make folks laugh. And what magnificent silver! There is no house like it anywhere, except at Paris."

The silver service, which had been given to Mademoiselle Laguerre by Bouret—a magnificent service by the famous Germain—had been literally stolen by la Soudry. At Mademoiselle Laguerre's death, she had simply put it in her own room and it had never been claimed by the heirs, who knew nothing of the worth of the inheritance.

For some time the twelve or fifteen persons who represented the first society of Soulanges had been in the habit of speaking of Madame Soudry as the intimate friend of Mademoiselle Laguerre, ignoring the word "maid," and pretending that she had sacrificed herself to her friendship for the singer, by becoming her companion.

It was strange, but true, that all these illusions became realities to Madame Soudry, and she believed them in her heart of hearts. She reigned tyrannically over her husband.

The gendarme, who was condemned to love a woman ten years older than himself, who kept the control of her own fortune, humored her in her idea of her beauty. Nevertheless, when some one envied him, and spoke to him of his happiness, he sometimes wished that the other man was in his place.

The portrait of this queen is slightly grotesque, but several examples of the same kind, of that date, may be still found in the provinces, some more or less noble, and others belonging to the wealthy

class; as, for example, the widow of a farmer-general in Touraine who still wore fillets of veal on her cheeks. This portrait, painted from nature, would be incomplete without the diamond frame in which it was incased, and without the principal courtiers, a sketch of whom is also necessary, were it only to explain how formidable such Lilliputians are, and what the organs of public opinion are like in little country towns. Let no one deny, however, that there are localities which, like Soulanges, without being either a city, a village, or a little town, have characteristics of each. The faces of the inhabitants are different from those in the heart of large, commonplace provincial towns; the country life has its influence on morals, and this mixture of tints produces figures that are truly original.

After Madame Soudry, the most important person was the notary Lupin, the business manager of the house of Soulanges; for it is useless to speak of old Gendrin-Vattebled, the head keeper, a nonogenarian at the point of death, who had been confined to the house ever since the advent of Madame Soudry; but after having reigned over Soulanges in the character of a man who has enjoyed his position ever since the reign of Louis XV., he still spoke in his lucid moments of the jurisdiction of the Marble Table.

Although he could count forty-five summers, Lupin was fresh and rosy, thanks to the plumpness which invariably attaches to people who live indoors. He still sung romances, and adhered to the elegant costume of drawing-room singers. He looked almost Parisian with his carefully varnished boots, his saffron-yellow waistcoats, his well-fitting coats, his rich silk cravats and his fashionable pantaloons. He had his hair curled by the hairdresser of Soulanges, who was the fashion-monger of the town, and attitudinized as something of a rake. He alone had been to Paris, where he had been received by the Soulanges. Thus it would have been impossible not to recognize at once the supremacy that he exercised in point of elegance both as a fashionable man and as a judge, only by hearing him speak a single word, with three modifications, the word "croute."*

A man, a piece of furniture, or a woman, might be "croute," or antiquated; in a second degree of imperfection, "crouton;" but the third form of the term, "croute-au-pot," was the superlative of contempt. "Croute" might be remedied, but "crouton" was hopeless; and as for "croute-au-pot!" oh! better never have come forth from nothingness. As for praise, he reduced it to a repetition of the word "charming." "It is charming" was the positive of his admiration. If a thing was "charming! charming!" it was perfectly correct. But when it came to "charming! charming! charming!" then the ladder could be drawn in at once; the heaven of perfection was reached.

The scrivener, for he called himself scrivener, petty notary, and keeper of notes, seeming to put himself by his raillery above his office, was on terms of gallantry with the mayor's wife, who had a secret liking for him, although he was blonde and wore spectacles. La Cochet had never fancied any except dark men, with mustaches, and with hairy tufts on their fingers; but she made an exception in Lupin's favor, because of his elegance, and she thought furthermore that her triumph at Soulanges would not be complete without an adorer.

The notary's voice was a counter-tenor; he sometimes gave a specimen of it in a corner or on the terrace, one of his ways of earning a reputation for "making himself agreeable," a rock against which all men of talent, and men of genius also, alas! come to grief.

Lupin had married an heiress in sabots and blue stockings, the only daughter of a salt merchant, who had become rich during the Revolution, which was an epoch when smugglers of salt made enormous profits, by favor of the reaction which took place against duties on importations. But he prudently left his wife at

* The word "croute" is a slang term for "behind the age; antiquated."

home, where she amused herself with a platonic attachment for a clerk, named Bonnet, who played in the second grade of society the rôle his patron filled in the first.

Madame Lupin, who was a woman without any education at all, only appeared upon high festival days, when she was like an enormous Burgundy barrel dressed in velvet, and surmounted by a little head which was buried in shoulders of a doubtful tint. No known method was capable of keeping her belt in its proper place; and the imagination of a poet, or better still, that of an inventor, could not have found on Bebelle's back a trace of that undulating sinuosity which is usually produced there by the vertebra of an ordinary woman.

Lupin concealed beneath his coarse exterior a subtle mind; he had the good sense to keep quiet about his fortune, which was at least as large as that of Rigou.

Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, was the despair of his father. He was an only son, and he refused to follow the paternal career; he abused his position as only son by making enormous drafts on the cash-box, but he never exhausted his father's indulgence, for the notary after each escapade always said: "I used to be just like that myself." Amaury never came to Madame Soudry's; he said she bored him, and he preferred the pleasures to be found at the Café de la Paix. He kept company with all the worst characters of Soulanges, even that of Bonnebault. He replied to his father's remonstrances by the perpetual refrain: "Send me to Paris; I am bored to death here."

While Lupin was the musician of the first society, Monsieur Gourdon, the doctor, was its learned man. It was said of him: "We have here a scholar of the first merit." Madame Soudry, in memory of the days when she had dressed Madame Laguerre for the opera, attempted to persuade all her friends, even Lupin, that they would have made their fortunes with their voices, and in like manner, she was wont to regret that the doctor had never published any of his ideas.

Monsieur Gourdon merely repeated the ideas of Buffon and Cuvier, which would scarcely have given him authority to pose as a savant before the eyes of the people of Soulanges; but he was making a collection of shells, and a herbarium, and he knew how to stuff birds. He had the glory of having promised a cabinet of natural history to the town of Soulanges; and henceforth he passed in the department for a great naturalist, the successor of Buffon.

This physician, like a banker of Geneva, whose pedantry, cold manner and puritanical propriety he copied, without having either the money or the calculating spirit, exhibited with excessive complacency the famous cabinet, which was composed of a bear and a monkey, which had died on their way to Soulanges; all the rodents of the department, the field-mice, the dormice, the mice and the rats, etc.; all the curious birds killed in Burgundy, among which shone an eagle of the Alps, taken in the Jura. He possessed a collection of lepidopteras, a word which made every one expect to see monstrosities, and caused them to remark when they saw the collection: "Why, it is nothing but butterflies!" He had a fine lot of fossil shells, gathered from the collections of several of his friends, who had bequeathed their accumulations to him when they died; and finally, he had minerals of Burgundy and the Jura.

These treasures, which were kept in cupboards with glass doors, below which cases of drawers contained a collection of insects, occupied the whole of the first floor of Gourdon's house and were rather effective by reason of the oddity of their classification, the magic of their colors, and the assemblage of so many objects to which no one paid any attention when they were seen in their natural state, but which were greatly admired under glass. There was a special day for going to see Monsieur Gourdon's cabinet.

"I have," he said to those who were curious, "five hundred subjects in ornithology, two hundred mammifers, five

thousand insects, three thousand shells, and seven hundred specimens of mineralogy."

"What patience you have had!" said the ladies.

"A man must do something for his country," he would reply.

He drew an enormous profit from his carcasses by the phrase: "I have left it all to the town in my will." And then the visitors admired his philanthropy. There was some talk of devoting the whole of the second floor of the mayor's house, after the physician's death, to the Gourdon Museum.

"I count upon the gratitude of my fellow-citizens to attach my name to it," he would say, "for I cannot hope that they will put up a marble bust."

"But that will be the least that they can do," they would reply; "are you not the glory of Soulanges?"

And the man finally came to look upon himself as one of the celebrities of Burgundy. The most solid income is not that which comes from consols, but that which is derived from self-love. The savant, to borrow a phrase from Lupin, was happy, happy, happy!

Gourdon, the registry clerk, was a mean-looking little man, all of whose features were gathered in the neighborhood of his neck, in such a manner that the nose seemed to be the point of departure for the forehead, the cheeks, and the mouth, which was attached to it as all the ravines of a mountain are born at the summit. He was regarded as one of the great poets of Burgundy, a Piron, it was said. The merits of the two brothers caused them to be spoken of in this way: "We have at Soulanges the two brothers Gourdon, two very distinguished men, two men who would be sure to hold their own in Paris."

The clerk was excessively fond of the game of cup and ball, and this mania brought on another, that of wanting to sing the praises of the game, which was all the rage in the eighteenth century. In mediocre intellects, one mania often accompanies another. Gourdon junior brought forth his poem in the reign of Napoleon. It is needless to say that it belonged to a healthy and prudent school. Luce de Lancival, Parny, Saint-Lambert, Roucher, Vigee, Andrieux, Berchoux, were its heroes. Delille was his god, until one day when the first society of Soulanges agitated the question whether Gourdon was not superior to Delille, after which the clerk always spoke with exaggerated politeness of Monsieur the Abbé Delille.

The poems, written from 1780 to 1814, were made after the same pattern, and the one on the cup and ball will illustrate them all. They required a certain knack. The "Chorister" is the Saturn of this abortive generation of jocular poems, which usually had about four cantos, it being recognized that six would wear the subject threadbare.

This poem of Gourdon's, named the "Ode to the Cup and Ball," followed the poetical rules of these departmental works, which were invariable in their form; they contained in the first canto the description of the object sung about, beginning, as did that of Gourdon, with an invocation, whose opening lines were as follows:

"I sing this fine game which belongs to all ages,
To the little and great, to the fools and the sages."

After having described the game, and the most beautiful cups and balls known, and told of what assistance the game was to the business of the Singe-Vert and other dealers in toys, and after proving that the game attained to the dignity of a science, Gourdon ended his first canto with this conclusion, which is like that of the first canto of all poems:

"It is thus that the arts and the sciences too
Turn to profit a thing which seems trivial to you."

The second canto is destined, as usual, to describe the manner of using the object, and the way in which one can derive profit from it in the eyes of women and in the world; a few lines will illustrate.

"Look now as he plays, in the midst of them all,
With his eye closely fixed on the ivory ball.

How he watches attentively every move,
As the disk flies aloft, or descends from above.
When the ball falls at length on his maladroit wrist,
His mistress consoles him; the place she has kissed.
He needs not your pity; the hurt is but small,
And one smile from her lips recompenses for all."

It was this picture, worthy of Virgil, which put in question the pre-eminence of Delille over Gourdon. The word disk, disputed by the positive Brunet, furnished material for discussions which lasted eleven months; but Gourdon the savant, one evening when the disputants were getting red in the face, crushed the anti-disk party by observing:

"The moon, which is called a disk by the poets, is a globe."

"How do you know?" asked Brunet. "We have never seen but one side."

The third canto contained the regulation story, in this case the celebrated anecdoter referring to the cup and ball. Every one knows it by heart; it was about a famous mistress of Louis XVI.; but according to the formula employed in the "Débats" from 1810 to 1814, for praising these works, "It borrowed new charms from the poetry and the accessories which the poet knew how to throw around it."

The fourth canto, in which the poem was resumed, was ended by these bold lines, which were suppressed from 1810 to 1814, but which came to light again in 1824, after Napoleon's death.

"I dared to sing thus in those times of alarm.
Ah! if kings would ne'er carry a different arm,
If people would always employ their leisure
In games that would give them such innocent pleasure,
Our Burgundy then, which has long lived in fear,
Would return to the good days of Saturn and Rhea."

These verses have been printed in a first and only edition, from the press of Bournier, the printer at Ville-aux-Fayes.

One hundred subscribers, by a subscription of three francs each, secured to the poem the dangerous precedent of an immortality, and the poem was none the less beautiful to them because these hundred persons had each heard it a hundred times in detail.

Madame Soudry had just suppressed the cup and ball, which had lain on the pier-table in the salon, and which for the last seven years had been an excuse for recitation; she had at length discovered that the cup and ball rivaled her own attractions.

As for the author, who boasted of having a well-filled portfolio, the terms in which he announced the advent of a rival to the first society of Soulanges will sufficiently characterize him.

"There is a very curious bit of news," he had said, about two years previous; "there is *another poet* in Burgundy! Yes," he continued, seeing the general astonishment painted on the surrounding faces, "he is from Macon. But what do you suppose he does? He puts the clouds into his verses. They are a perfect jumble; lakes, stars, waves! Not a single reasonable image, not an argument. He is ignorant of the very sources of poetry. He calls the sky by its name, he says moon quite plainly, instead of 'star of the night.' People will go so far in their wish to be original," he added, mournfully. "Poor young man! to be a native of Burgundy, and to sing odes to water; it is a great pity. If he had consulted me, I would have given him one of the finest subjects in the world, a poem on wine, an ode to Bacchus, for which I feel myself too old."

This great poet was ignorant of the greatest of his triumphs (although he owed it to the fact that he was a Burgundian), that of having lived in Soulanges, which is entirely ignorant of the modern Pleiades, even of their names.

A hundred Gourdons sang under the Empire, and yet the period has been accused of lacking literature! Consult the "Bookseller's Journal," and you will see poems on the game of chess, on backgammon, on geography, typography, comedy, etc., without counting Delille's masterpieces on pity, imagination, and conversation; and those of Berchoux on

gastronomy, the science of dancing, etc. Perhaps in fifty years people will be making fun of the thousand poems that followed meditations, orientals, etc. Who can foresee the changes in taste, the oddities of fashion, and the transformations of the human mind? The generations as they pass will sweep away every vestige of the idols that they find on their path, and they make new gods which will in their turn be overthrown.

Sarcus, a handsome little old man with a head sprinkled with gray, occupied himself both with Themis and Flora, or, in other words, with legislation and with a hot-house. He had been meditating for twelve years a book on the "History of the Institution of Justices of the Peace," "whose political and judiciary rôle had already," according to him, "had several phases, for they all existed by reason of the Code of Brumaire, in the year IV., and to-day this institution, so precious to the country, had lost its value for want of salaries which were in harmony with the importance of the functions, which should be performed by officials whose office would be permanent." He was called in the community an able man, and was accepted as the politician of this salon. He was certainly its bore. It was said of him that he talked like a book. Gaubertin promised him the Legion of Honor, but he put it off until the day when, as Leclercq's successor, he should be seated on the benches of the center left.

Guerbet, the tax-gatherer, the man of wit, a great heavy fellow with a butter-face, a false forelock and gold earrings, which were always getting in the way of his shirt-collars, had the hobby of pomology. Proud of possessing the finest fruit-garden in the arrondissement, he gathered his first crops a month later than those of Paris. He cultivated in his hot-beds the most tropical fruits, even bananas, nectarines and green peas. He proudly brought a bouquet of strawberries to Madame Soudry when they were worth ten sous a basket in Paris.

In Monsieur Vermut, the apothecary, Soulanges possessed a chemist who was more of a chemist than Sarcus was a statesman, or Lupin a singer, or Gourdon the elder a savant, or his brother a poet. Nevertheless, the first society of the town paid little attention to Vermut, and for the second he did not even exist. Perhaps the one class instinctively felt the real superiority of the thinker who seldom spoke, and who smiled at follies with such a mocking air that they were suspicious of his science, which they questioned under their breath; as for the other class, they did not take the trouble to think of him at all.

Vermut was the butt of Madame Soudry's salon. No society is complete without a victim, some one to pity, to mock at, to scorn, and to protect. Vermut, occupied with scientific problems, came with a loosely tied cravat, an open waistcoat, and a little green redingote which was always soiled.

The little man, who had the patience of a chemist, could not play (according to the word which is used in the provinces to express the abolition of domestic power) Madame Vermut, who was a charming woman, merry, and a good gamester, for she could lose forty sous without saying a word, who railed against her husband, plagued him with her epigrams, and described him as a fool who knew how to distill nothing but ennui. Madame Vermut was one of those women who in a small town are the life of society. She furnished the little world with salt; kitchen salt, it is true, but what salt! She permitted herself jokes that were rather broad, but they were allowed to pass; she was capable of saying to the Curé Taupin, who was a man seventy years of age, with white hair:

"Hold your tongue, my lad!"

The miller of Soulanges, who had an income of fifty thousand francs, had an only daughter whom Lupin had in his mind for Amaury, since he had lost all hope of marrying him to Mademoiselle Gaubertin, and President Gaubertin also had designs upon her for his son, the keeper of mortgages; which was another source of antagonism.

This miller, a Sarcus Taupin, was the

Nucingen of the town. He was said to have three millions; but he would enter into no speculations; he thought only of the grinding of wheat, and of monopolizing it, and he recommended himself by an absolute lack of good manners or politeness.

Guerbet the father, brother of the postmaster of Conches, had an income of about ten thousand francs, besides his salary as tax-gatherer. The Gourdons were rich; the doctor had married the only daughter of old Monsieur Gendrin-Vattebled, the head keeper of waters and forests, who was expected to die; and the registry clerk had married the niece and sole heir of the Abbé Taupin, the curé of Soulanges, a fat priest who had retired within his cure as a rat in his cheese.

This clever ecclesiastic, who had a firm place in the best society and was kind and complaisant with the second class, and apostolic to the unfortunate, was much loved in Soulanges; he was cousin to the miller, and cousin to Sarcus, and he belonged to the middle class people of the Avonne valley. He always dined in the town; he economized; he went to weddings and left before the dancing began; he never talked politics; he did without the necessities of the service, saying: "That is my business;" and they allowed him to do it, saying: "We have a good curé." The bishop, who knew the people of Soulanges, without being deceived as to the value of the curé, thought himself fortunate in having in such a town a man who could get religion accepted, who could fill his church and preach in it to nodding bonnets.

It is useless to point out that Père Guerbet understood finances perfectly, and that Soudry might have been minister of war. Thus, not only did each of these worthy bourgeois possess one of those specialties of caprice, so necessary to the existence of a provincial man, but furthermore, each one had no rival in his own particular field in the domain of vanity.

If Cuvier had gone to the place anonymously, the first society of Soulanges would have been convinced that he knew very little in comparison with Monsieur Gourdon the physician. "Nourrit, with his pretty thread of a voice," said the notary, with protecting indulgence, "would have been thought scarcely worthy to accompany the nightingale of Soulanges." As to the author of the "Ode to the Cup and Ball," which was at that time being printed, it was thought that such another poet could not be found, not even in Paris; for Delille was dead.

This provincial society, so complacently satisfied with itself, could thus express all social superiorities. The imagination of those who, at some period in their lives, have lived for any length of time in a little town of this kind, can perhaps alone fully imagine the air of profound satisfaction upon the faces of these people, who believed themselves the solar plexus of France, all armed as they were with an incredible cunning for evil-doing, and who, in their wisdom, had decreed that one of the heroes of Essling was a coward, that Madame de Montcornet was a schemer, and that the Abbé Brossette was an ambitious little man; and who, fifteen years after the sale of les Aigues, had discovered the obscure origin of the general, who was surnamed by them the Shopman.

If Rigou, Soudry and Gaubertin had all lived in Ville-aux-Fayes they would have quarreled; their pretensions would inevitably have conflicted; but fate willed it that the Lucullus of Blangy should feel the necessity of solitude to roll at his ease in usury and voluptuousness; that Madame Soudry was intelligent enough to understand that she could reign only at Soulanges, and that Ville-aux-Fayes was Gaubertin's headquarters. Those who are fond of studying social nature will confess that General Montcornet was particularly unfortunate in finding such enemies separated and fulfilling the evolutions of their power and their vanity at distances from each other which did not permit their orbits to conflict, and which thus doubled their power for mischief.

Nevertheless, if all these worthy bourgeois, proud of their easy circumstances, regarded their society as much more harmonious than that of Ville-aux-Fayes,

and repeated with comic importance this saying of the valley: "Soulanges is a town of pleasure and society," it would scarcely be prudent to think that the Avonne capital would accept this supremacy. Gaubertin's salon secretly made fun of Soudry's. From Gaubertin's manner of saying: "We others, we are a city of immense commerce, a busy city, and we are foolish enough to wear ourselves out making fortunes!" it was easy to recognize a slight antagonism between the earth and the moon. The moon flattered itself that it was useful to the earth and the earth lorded it over the moon. The earth and the moon, notwithstanding, lived in terms of closest intimacy. During the carnival, the best society in Soulanges always attended the four balls given by Gaubertin, by Gendrin, by Leclercq, the receiver of finances, and by Soudry, junior, the king's deputy. Every Sunday, Soudry, junior, his wife, Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin, dined at the house of the Soudrys of Soulanges. When the sous-prefect had been invited, when the postmaster, Monsieur Guerbet of Conches, arrived to partake of the feast, Soulanges was treated to the spectacle of four department equipages standing before the Soudrys' door.

XV.

THE CONSPIRATORS AT THE QUEEN'S.

On arriving there, about half-past five o'clock, Rigou knew he would find the habitués of the Soudrys' salon all at their posts. At the mayor's house, as was the custom in the city, they dined at three o'clock, according to the fashion of the last century. From five to nine o'clock, the notabilities of Soulanges met to exchange their news, make their political speeches, comment on the happenings in the private life of all their neighbors, talking of Aigues, which furnished gossip for every hour in the day. It was the business of every one to learn something of what was passing there, and they knew that by so doing their welcome would be warmer from the heads of the different houses.

After this obligatory review, they sat down to play "Boston," the only game with which the queen was familiar. After fat father Guerbet had mimicked Madame Isaure, Gaubertin's wife, by making fun of her languid airs, imitating her shrill voice, her little mouth and juvenile manners; when the curé, Monsieur Taupin, had related one of the little stories of his repetoire; when Lupin had reported some event of "Ville-aux-Fayes," and when Madame Soudry had been overwhelmed with sickly compliments, then they all cried out: "We have had a delightful game of Boston."

Too much of an egotist to put himself out to travel the twelve kilometers, at the end of which he would be apt to hear the nonsense uttered by the frequenters of this house and to see a monkey disguised as an old woman, Rigou, very superior in mind and in education to this petty bourgeoisie, never showed himself, except when business called him to the notary's. He was excused from visiting, offering as an excuse his occupations, his habits and his health, "which would not permit him," he said, "to return home after night, by a route which ran alongside the foggy Thune."

This great usurer imposed himself, however, a great deal on Madame Soudry; who divined in him the tiger with steel claws, the savage malice, the wisdom born in the cloister, ripened in the brilliant sunshine of gold, and with whom Gaubertin had never dared commit himself.

As soon as the wicker carriage and horse had passed the Café de la Paix, Urbain, Soudry's domestic, who was talking to the coffee-house keeper, seated on a bench placed under the dining-room windows, shaded his eyes with his hand, in order to see more clearly to whom this equipage belonged.

"Oh! here comes Père Rigou!—Must open the door. Hold his horse, Socquard," he said to the innkeeper, in a familiar tone.

And Urbain, an old cavalry soldier, who

had not been able to pass an examination for police officer, and had taken service with Soudry, as a last resource, entered the house, to go and open the door of the courtyard.

Socquard, this so truly illustrious personage in the valley, was there, as you see, without any ceremony; but there are a great many illustrious men who have the kindness to walk, to sneeze, to sleep and to eat exactly like common mortals.

Socquard, a Spaniard by birth, could lift eleven hundred-weight; a blow from his fist, applied to a man's back, would break the vertebral column. He could twist a bar of iron and stop a carriage to which a horse was harnessed. Milon de Crotone of the valley, his reputation embarrassed all the department, and they told the most ridiculous stories about him, as they did about all celebrities. Thus, they related in the Morvan, that one day he had carried a poor woman, her ass and her sack to market on his back; that he had eaten an ox and drank a quarter-cask of wine in one day, etc., etc. As gentle as a marriageable girl, Socquard, who was a fat little man, with a pleasant face, large shoulders, and a full chest, on which his heart played a bellows, possessed a thread of a voice whose limpidity surprised those who heard him speak for the first time.

Like Tonsard, whose renown dispensed with all outward proof of ferocity, like all those who are vested with a public opinion of any kind, Socquard never showed off his triumphant muscular force, or at least, only when asked to do so by friends. He took the horse's bridle, when the father-in-law of the king's deputy drew up before the threshold.

"Are you well at home, Monsieur Rigou?" said the illustrious Socquard.

"Pretty well, my dear fellow," replied Rigou. "Plissoud and Bonnebault, Viallet and Amaury, do they still live with you?"

This question, though asked in a tone of good-fellowship and interest, was not one of those thoughtless questions thrown by chance by a superior to an inferior. In his spare moments, Rigou thought out the slightest details, and already the acquaintance of Bonnebault, of Plissoud and the Corporal Viallet had been mentioned to Rigou by Fourchon as suspicious.

Bonnebault, for a few francs lost at play, could sell the peasants' secrets to the corporal; or talk without an idea of the importance of his babbling, after having drank a few bowls of punch. But the information of the otter hunter might be the result of thirst, and Rigou paid no attention to that, except in his connection with Plissoud, to whom his situation ought to inspire a certain desire to oppose the inspirations directed against les Aigues; were it for no other reason than to grease his hand by one or the other of the two parties.

Correspondent of the assurances, which were beginning to show themselves in France, the agent of a society against the chances of recruiting, which made his fortune much more difficult to accumulate, his vices were a love of billiards and the wine cup. With Fourchon, he cultivated the art of occupying himself doing nothing, and he expected to make his fortune by some unknown chance. He profoundly hated the highest society, but he acknowledged its power. Plissoud was intimately acquainted with the bourgeoise tyranny organized by Gaubertin; he followed up with his sarcasm the rich men of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes. Without credit or fortune he did not seem to fear them; thus Brunet delighted at having a despised competitor, protected him, so that he would not sell his essay to some ardent young man, like Bonnac, for example, with whom he would have been obliged to divide the patronage of the canton.

"Thanks to these people, et 'boulottes,'" replied Socquard; "but they imitate my mulled wine."

"Prosecute them!" said Rigou, sententiously.

"That would lead me too far," replied the innkeeper, playing on his words, without knowing it.

"Do they live peacefully together, these customers of yours?"

"They are always having some altercation; but then they are gamesters, and that pardons everything."

The windows of the salon, facing the street, were filled with curious heads. On recognizing his daughter-in-law's father, Soudry came out to the steps to receive him.

"Well, my good fellow," said the ex-soldier, using this word in its primitive sense, "is Annette ill, that you favor us with your society this evening?"

By a remnant of gendarme bluntness, the mayor always went straight to the point.

"No, there is a quarrel," replied Rigou, touching with the index finger of his right hand the hand which Soudry held out to him; "we will talk about it, as it concerns our children a little—"

Soudry, a fine looking man, clothed in blue as though he still belonged to the army, with a black collar, and spurred boots, took Rigou's arm. The French window was open on the terrace, where the guests were walking about, enjoying the summer's evening, which glorified the magnificent landscape spread around them.

"It is a long time since we have seen you, my dear Rigou," said Madame Soudry, taking the arm of the ex-Benedictine, and leading him out on the terrace.

"My digestion is so bad," replied the old usurer. "Just see, my color is almost as vivid as yours."

Rigou's appearance on the terrace called forth an explosion of jolly salutations among these people.

"Laugh, Glutton! I have discovered one more," cried Monsieur Guerbet the preceptor, offering his hand to Rigou, who merely placed the index finger of his right hand in it.

"Not bad! not bad!" said Sarcus, the little justice of the peace, "he is a good deal of a gourmand, our Lord of Blangy."

"Lord!" replied Rigou, bitterly; "it is a long time since I have been the cock of my own dunghill."

"That is not the opinion of the hens, you great rascal!" said the Soudry, giving him a playful tap with her fan.

"Are you well, my dear master?" said the notary, greeting his principal client.

"So, so," replied Rigou, who again placed his index finger in the notary's right hand.

This gesture, by which Rigou restrained any demonstrative hand grasps, should have pictured the man's inner nature to those who did not know him.

"Let us find a corner, in which we can talk without interruption," said the ancient hobgoblin, looking at Lupin and Madame Soudry.

"Let us return to the salon," replied the queen. "These gentlemen," she added, pointing out Monsieur Gourdon the doctor, and Guerbet, "are arguing on a 'point de côté'—"

Madame Soudry was delighted with the point in discussion; Guerbet was always so spirituel, he had said: "c'est un point de côté." The queen thought it was a scientific term, and Rigou smiled as he heard her repeat this word with such a pretentious air.

"What has the Tapissier done now?" demanded Soudry, who had seated himself beside his wife, his arm around her waist.

Like all old women, the Soudry pardoned many things for the sake of a public exhibition of tenderness.

"But," replied Rigou, in a low voice, as an example of prudence, "he has started for the préfecture, there to reclaim the execution of judgments and to demand assistance."

"He is lost," said Lupin, rubbing his hands; "they will butcher him."

"They will butcher him?" observed Soudry, "that depends. If the prefect and the general, who are his friends, send a squadron of cavalry, the peasants will butcher nobody—they can, at a pinch, defy the soldiers of Soulanges; but it is another thing to resist a charge of cavalry."

"Sibilet heard him say something more dangerous than that, and that is what brought me here," replied Rigou.

"Oh! my poor Sophie!" cried Madame Soudry sentimentally, "into what hands has Aigues fallen. This is what the Rev-

olution has done for us; be-tasseled bullies! They ought to have known that when they turned a bottle upside down the dregs would mount and spoil the wine."

"His intention is to go to Paris, and intrigue near the keeper of the seals, to get favor in the tribunal."

"Ah!" said Lupin, "he has seen his danger."

"If they name my son-in-law for advocate-general, there is nothing to say against it, and he will replace him by some Parisian in his devotion," replied Rigou. "If he demands a seat on the bench for Monsieur Gendrin, if he has Monsieur Guerbet, nominated for our 'juge d'instruction,' president to Auxerre, he will upset all our plans. The soldiers are already on his side; if he gains over the tribunal, and if he retains near him such counselors as the Abbé Brossette and Michaud, we will not be invited to the feast. He can make a great deal of trouble for us."

"How is it that for fifteen years you have not known how to rid yourself of Abbe Brossette?" asked Lupin.

"You do not know him. He is as defiant as a blackbird," replied Rigou. "He is not a man, this priest; he pays no court to women. I can see no passion of any kind in him; he is unassailable. A man who has a vice is always the valet to his enemies, when they know how to pull the string. The strong ones are those who lead their vices, instead of being led by them. The peasants are getting along very well, they hold our world at bay against the abbé, but they can as yet make no headway against him. Look at Michaud! Men like these are too perfect, it is better for the good God to call them to Him—"

"The Tapissier loves his wife and he can be caught by that—"

"Let us see if he follows out his ideas," said Madame Soudry.

"How!" asked Lupin.

"You, Lupin," replied Rigou, in an authoritative tone, "you must wend your way to the prefecture to see the beautiful Madame Sarcus, this evening! You must manage to make her repeat to her husband all that the Tapissier has said and done at the prefecture."

"I will be obliged to sleep there," replied Lupin.

"So much the better for Sarcus the Rich, he will gain by it," remarked Rigou. "As to you, Lupin, come back to Papa Gaubertin's. You will announce to him that a boon companion and myself," he said, as he struck Soudry's chest a great blow, "will come and break a crust with him, and ask a breakfast of him at midday. Put him *au courant* with things, so that each of us may agree, for it is a question now of getting rid of this 'cursed Tapissier. My idea in coming to you was to say that he must embroil the Tapissier with the tribunal, in such a way that the keeper of the seals will laugh in his face when he comes to ask him to make changes in the government of Ville-aux-Fayes—"

"Long live the Church people!" cried Lupin, patting Rigou on the shoulder.

Madame Soudry was immediately struck with an idea, which could only come from the brain of an ex-lady's maid of an opera singer.

"If we can only get the Tapissier to the feast at Soulanges, and make him lose his head to a pretty girl, he will perhaps become entangled with this girl and quarrel with his wife, and by this she will learn that a cabinet-maker's son will always go back to his first loves—"

"Ah! my beauty," cried Soudry, "you have more wit in you alone than all the police force of Paris!"

"This idea only goes to prove that madame is our queen, as much by intelligence as by beauty," said Lupin, gallantly.

Lupin was rewarded by a grimace, which was accepted in the first society of Soulanges without protest as a smile.

"It would be better," said Rigou, who had remained thoughtful for a long time, "if this could be turned into a scandal."

"Verbal-process and complaint, a police court affair," cried Lupin. "Oh! that would be too fine!"

"What pleasure," said Soudry naïvely,

"to see the Comte de Montcornet, cross of the Legion of Honor, commander of Saint Louis, lieutenant-general, accused of having attempted in a public place, bashfully, for example—"

"He loves his wife too much!" said Lupin, judiciously. "You will never lead him as far as that."

"That is not an obstacle; but I can think of no young girl in the whole neighborhood capable of making a saint sin. I have been on the lookout for my abbé!" cried Rigou.

"What do you say to Gatienne Giboulard, of Auxerre, the one Sarcus's son is so crazy over?" asked Lupin.

"She would be the only one," replied Rigou; "but she would not do for us. She thinks that all she has to do is to show herself to be admired. She is not crafty enough, and we need a trickster, a sly one. But never mind, she will come."

"Yes," said Lupin; "the more pretty girls he will see, the better our chances are."

"It will be difficult to persuade the Tapissier to come to the fair! And, if he does come to the feast, will he go to our ball at the Tivoli?" said the ex-soldier.

"The reason that prevented him from coming does not exist this year, my dear heart," replied Madame Soudry.

"What reason was that, my beauty?" asked Soudry.

"The Tapissier tried to marry Mademoiselle de Soulanges," said the notary; "he was told that she was too young, and it piqued him. This is why Messieurs de Soulanges and de Montcornet, these two old friends—for both served in the Imperial Guard—are so cold and distant that they never see each other. The Tapissier did not wish to meet the De Soulanges at the fair; but this year they are not coming."

Ordinarily the De Soulanges family sojourned at the chateau in July, August, September and October; but the general commanded a regiment of artillery in Spain, under the Duc d'Angoulême, and the comtesse had accompanied him. At the siege of Cadiz, the Comte de Soulanges won, as we know, the marechal's baton, which was in 1826. Montcornet's enemies might well believe that the inhabitants of les Aigues would not always look down upon the feasts of Notre Dame in August, and that it would thus be easy to attract them to Tivoli.

"That is right," cried Lupin. "Well, it remains for you, papa," he said, addressing himself to Rigou, "to maneuver in such a manner that you succeed in making him come to the fair. We will know how to entrap him."

The Soulanges Fair, which was celebrated on the 15th of August, was one of the specialties of this city, and was more important than all the other fairs for thirty miles around—even than those of the chief town of the department. Ville-aux-Fayes had no fair, for its feast, that of Saint Sylvester, fell in winter.

From the 12th to the 15th of August the merchants flocked to Soulanges, and built, on two parallel lines, their wooden booths and their canvas houses, which lent an animated physiognomy to this ordinarily deserted-looking place. The fifteen days during which the fair and feast lasted produced a species of harvest to the little town of Soulanges. This feast was authorized, and carried the prestige of a tradition. The peasants, as Father Fourchon said, left their commune, where their work held them. For all France, the fantastic outspreading of improvised stores, objects of necessity or of vanity to the peasants, who, besides, have no other shows, exercised a periodical seduction over the imagination of women and children. Thus, as soon as the 12th of August came, the mayor of Soulanges caused to be posted, the entire length of the community of Ville-aux-Fayes, placards, signed "Soudry," that promised protection to the merchants, to the clowns and the "freaks" of every kind, announcing the duration of the fair and its most attractive spectacles.

On these placards, which were claimed by Tonsard for Vermichel, this final line could always be read:

"Tivoli will be illuminated by colored lights."

The great effects produced by the

Socquard ball on the imagination of the inhabitants of this valley made them very proud of their Tivoli. Those country people who had ventured as far as Paris said that the Parisian Tivoli only surpassed that of Soulanges in its size. Gaubertin sturdily preferred Socquard's ball to the Tivoli ball at Paris.

"We will think it all over," said Rigou. "The Parisian, this editor of newspapers, will end by being tired of his pleasure, and we can attract all the domestics to the fair. Sibilet, though his credit is getting exceedingly low, may be able to insinuate to his bourgeois that this is a way to make himself popular."

"Find out then if the beautiful comtesse is cruel to monsieur. It all lies in a nutshell, if we can only make him play the fool at the Tivoli," said Lupin to Rigou.

"This little woman," cried Madame Soudry, "is too much of a Parisienne not to know how to obviate two inconveniences at once."

"Fourchon has married his granddaughter, Catherine Tonsard, to Charles, Tapissier's second valet; we will soon know what is going on in the apartments of Aigues," replied Rigou. "Are you sure of Abbé Taupin?" he said, as he saw the curé coming in.

"L'Abbé and all the rest? We hold them as I hold Soudry!" said Madame Soudry, caressing her husband's chin, to whom she said: "Old fellow, you are not unhappy, are you?"

"If I can only get up a scandal against this hypocrite of a Brossette, I count upon them!" said Rigou, in a low tone, which he gradually raised; "but I do not know if the spirit of the country can work upon the priestly spirit. You do not know what it is. As I am not a fool, I will not answer for myself; and if I found myself getting sick, I would no doubt become reconciled to the Church."

"Permit us to hope so," said the curé, for whose benefit Rigou had purposely raised his voice.

"Alas! the sin I committed in marrying forbids this reconciliation," replied Rigou. "I cannot kill Madame Rigou."

"In the meantime, let us turn our attention to les Aigues," said Madame Soudry.

"Yes," replied the ex-Benedictine. "Do you know that I think our compatriot at Ville-aux-Fayes stronger than us? I have an idea that Gaubertin wants les Aigues for himself alone, and that he will leave us out in the cold," added Rigou.

In his rambles, the country usurer had with his baton of prudence been beating Gaubertin's obscure corners, and listening to their hollow ring.

"But les Aigues will fall to none of us three. It would be necessary to demolish it from top to bottom!" cried Soudry.

"Nevertheless, I should not be at all astonished if hidden gold were found there," said Rigou, slyly.

"Bah!"

"Yes; during the old-time wars, the lords were often besieged and surprised, and buried their treasures to keep them from being captured; and you know that the Marquis de Soulanges-Hautemer, with whom the cadet branch died out, was one of the victims of the Biron conspiracy. The Comtesse de Moret received the estate by confiscation."

"See what it is to be acquainted with the history of France!" cried the old gendarme. "You are right, it is time to tally our facts with Gaubertin."

"And if he evades us," added Rigou, "we will see how we can get the best of him."

"He is quite rich enough now to be an honest man," said Lupin.

"I will answer for him as for myself," cried Madame Soudry; "he is the most honest man in the kingdom."

"We believe in his honesty," replied Rigou; "but nothing must be neglected between friends. By the way, I suspect some one in Soulanges of giving him the tip."

"Who?" asked Soudry.

"Plissoud," replied Rigou.

"Plissoud," exclaimed Soudry, "the poor jade! Brunet holds him by the leg and his wife by the jaw; ask Lupin."

"What can he do?" said Lupin.

"He wishes to enlighten Montcornet," said Rigou, "have his protection and place him—"

"This will never weigh as much as his wife to Soulanges," said Madame Soudry.

"He tells his wife everything when he is tipsy," observed Lupin. "We shall know all in good time."

"The beautiful Madame Plissoud has no secrets from you," replied Rigou. "Well, we can make ourselves easy on that point."

"She is, nevertheless, as silly as she is beautiful," replied Madame Soudry. "I would not change places with her; for, if I were a man, I would rather have a homely witty woman than a beauty who had not a word to say for herself."

"Ah!" responded the notary, biting his lips, "she knows how to say three."

"Bosh!" cried Rigou, making for the door.

"Well," said Soudry, showing his friend out, "I will see you to-morrow early."

"I will call for you. By the way, Lupin," he said to the notary, who came out with him to give orders for his horse to be saddled, "see that Madame Sarcus learns all that our friend Tapissier is doing against us at the préfecture—"

"If she cannot know, who will?" replied Lupin.

The two deep politicians pressed each other's hands and separated.

Rigou, who was not anxious to be found traveling the roads alone at night—for he was always prudent, notwithstanding his recent popularity—said to his horse: "Go along, Citizen!" This was a little joke, which this offspring of 1793 shot off against the Revolution.

"Père Rigou does not make very long visits," said Gourdon, the clerk, to Madame Soudry.

"They are entertaining, if they are short," replied she.

"He abuses everything, as he does his life," Gourdon answered.

"So much the better," said Soudry; "my son will enjoy his wealth all the sooner."

"Did he give you any news of Aigues?" asked the curé.

"Yes, my dear abbé," said Madame Soudry. "Those people are the curse of this country. I cannot understand why Madame de Montcornet, who is a very sensible woman, does not attend to her interests better."

"They have a model under their eyes, however."

"Who do you mean?" asked Madame Soudry, snickering.

"Soulanges."

"Ah! yes," said the queen after a short pause.

"Well, here I am!" cried Madame Vermut, entering at that moment, "and without my re-active, for Vermut is too inactive, to my way of thinking, for me to call him an active of any kind whatsoever."

"What the devil is that Rigou doing?" said Soudry to Guerbet, as he saw the carry-all stop before the door of Le Tivoli. "He is one of those tiger-cats whose every action has an object."

"Sacré lui va!" replied the fat little preceptor.

"He is going into the Café de la Paix," said Doctor Gourdon.

"Do not be uneasy," replied Gourdon, the clerk, "he is blessing them; you can hear their yelping from here."

"That café," added the curé, "is like the temple of Janus. It called itself the Café de la Guerre in the time of the Empire, and they lived in a perfect calm; the most honorable bourgeois met there to chat amicably—"

"He calls that chatting!" said the justice of the peace. "Ye gods! what conversations can compare to those of Bournier!—"

"But since, in honor of the Bourbons, they have named it the Café de la Paix, they are continually quarreling," said the Abbé Taupin, finishing the sentence which the justice of the peace had taken the liberty to interrupt.

This idea of the curé's was like quotations from the "Bilboquéide," they sometimes repeated themselves.

"That is to say," replied Guerbet,

"that Burgundy will always be a country of blows."

"What you have just said is not bad!" cried the curé; "it's a true history of our country."

"I know nothing of the history of my country," said Soudry; "but, before learning it, I would like to know why my compatriot has just gone into the café with Socquard?"

"Oh!" replied the curé, "if he has gone in, you may be certain that it is from no deed of charity."

"That man makes my flesh creep when I see him," said Madame Vermut.

"He is so much to be feared," replied the doctor, "that I could not reassure myself as to his death; he is a man who would rise out of his coffin to play some one a wicked trick."

"If any one can send the Tapissier here on the 15th of August, and entangle him in some scrape, it is Rigou," said the mayor aside to his wife.

"Above all," she replied in a loud voice, "if Gaubertin and thee, my dear heart, mix up in it—"

"Listen to what I am saying," cried Monsieur Guerbet, giving Monsieur Sarcus's elbow a shove; "he has found some pretty girl at Socquard's, and he is putting her into his carriage—"

"In the meantime—" added the clerk.

"That is a joke without any malice in it," cried Monsieur Guerbet, sarcastically.

"You are wrong, gentlemen," said Madame Soudry. "Monsieur Rigou is only thinking of our interests, for if I am not mistaken, that girl is a daughter of Tonsard's."

"He is like the pharmacist who lays in a stock of vipers," cried Guerbet.

"One would say that you had seen Monsieur Vermut, our worthy pharmacist, from the way in which you speak," replied Doctor Gourdon.

And he pointed out of the window, across the square, to the little apothecary of Soulanges, who was hurrying along the street.

"The poor little man," said the clerk, who was suspected of being very attentive to Madame Vermut; "see how awkward he is!— And he is thought to be wise!"

"Without him," replied the justice of the peace, "we would often be embarrassed at our autopsies. He was the one who discovered the poison in poor Pigeron's stomach, and the Parisian chemist at the court of assizes said he himself could not have done any better—"

"He found nothing at all," responded Soudry; "but as President Gendrin said, it is always better to presuppose poison."

"Madame Pigeron did well to leave Auxerre!" said Madame Vermut. "She was small-minded, and at the same time a great rascal. Is it necessary to have recourse to drugs to annul the marriage tie? Have we not much more certain and yet innocent means of ridding ourselves of any such burden? I would like to see a man find fault with my conduct! Vermut is not very pleasing to me, but he is not any sicker for that; and Madame de Montcornet, just see how she strolls among her chalets and charterhouses with that journalist, who comes from Paris at her expense, and how they cuddle each other under the general's eyes."

"At her expense?" cried Madame Soudry. "Are you sure? If we could only prove it, what a charming subject it would be for an anonymous letter to the general."

"The general!" replied Madame Vermut; "but you would prevent nothing. The Tapissier makes his own conditions."

"What conditions, my good friend?" demanded Madame Soudry.

"Well, he provides the lodgings."

"If poor Pigeron, instead of crossing his wife, had only been wise, he might have been alive to-day," said the clerk.

Madame Soudry leaned toward her neighbor, Monsieur Guerbet de Conches; she treated him to one of her apish grimaces, which she flattered herself she had inherited from her old mistress, as she did her money, by right of conquest; and redoubling her grimaces, as a sign to the postmaster to watch Madame Vermut, who was coquetting with the

author of the "Bilboquéide," she said to him:

"What bad taste that woman has! What talk and what manners! I do not know that I can admit her much longer 'dans notre société,' especially when Monsieur Gourdon, the poet, is here."

"And verily, this is indeed a moral society!" said the curé, who had been watching and listening to everything, without saying a word.

After this epigram, or rather this satire upon the "société," which was so concise and so true that it squelched every one, it was proposed to play a game of Boston.

Is not this a picture of life, as it is, on all the stages of what is commonly called the world? Change the terms, and there is nothing less, nothing more in the gilded salons of Paris.

XVI.

THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX.

It was about seven o'clock when Rigou was passing before the Café de la Paix. The setting sun, slanting across the pretty town, bathed it in a rosy tint, and the clear mirror of the waters of the lake formed a contrast with the pomp of the sparkling windows, from which shone out the most improbable and strangest colors.

He had become pensive, this deep politician, and buried deep in his plots, he had allowed his horse to go his own gait, when, as he neared the door of La Paix, he heard his name mentioned in one of those disputes which had made the name of this establishment such a travesty, in its habitual condition of contention.

To understand this scene, it is necessary to explain the topography of this land of milk and honey, bordered by the café on the square and headed at the end of the canton road by the famous Tivoli, which the ringleaders intended should serve as the theater for one of the scenes of the conspiracy which had been brewing for so long a time against General de Montcornet.

From its situation at the corner of the square and the roadway, the first floor of this house, built after the fashion of Rigou's, had three windows on the roadway, and on the square two windows, between which stood the glass door by which you entered. The Café de la Paix had a private door also, opening on an alley way, which separated it from the next house, that of Vallet, the haberdasher of Soulanges, and by which you passed into an interior courtyard.

This house, painted in golden yellow, with green shutters, was one of the few houses in the little town which boasted of two stories and a mansard. And this was why.

Before the marvelous prosperity of Ville-aux-Fayes, the first story of this house, which contained four bedrooms, each furnished with a bed and such meager necessities as justified the name of "furnished lodgings," were rented to the people obliged to come to Soulanges for the jurisdiction of the district, and to visitors whom they did not have room for at the chateau; but, for twenty-five years or more, these furnished rooms had for lodgers only the mountebanks, the feed merchants, the vendors of patent medicines and the commercial travelers who happened to pass that way. At the time of the Soulanges fête, these rooms rented as high as four francs a-piece per day. These four rooms of Socquard's brought him in a hundred francs, without counting the income of the extraordinary trade which his lodgers brought to his café.

The façade of the side facing the square was ornamented by special paintings. In the picture which separated each crosspiece of the door was seen billiard cues, amorously tied with ribbons; and above the knots were painted bowls of smoking punch, in Grecian cups. These words: "Café de la Paix" shone forth, painted in gold on a green background, at each extremity of which were pyramids of tricolored billiard balls. The windows, outlined in green, had little panes of common glass.

A dozen of arbor vitæ trees, planted right and left in their boxes, and which were called trees by the frequenters of the café, put forth a sickly pretentious vegetation. The awnings by which the shop keepers of Paris and certain opulent citizens protected their stores from the intense heat of the sun were at that time an unknown luxury in Soulanges. The phials exposed on shelves behind the window panes no longer merited their name, as the *bennet* liquor was subject to periodical cookings. In concentrating its rays through the lenticular unevenness of the panes, the sun caused the bottles of Madeira, the syrups, the wines, and the liquors to boil, and spoiled the boxes of prunes and the bottles of brandied cherries; the heat being so intense that it forced Aglaé, her father and their boy to pass their time on two benches placed on each side of the door and but half shel-

tered by the poor shrubs, which Mademoiselle Socquard watered so carefully with warm water. On certain days you saw all three, the father, the daughter and the boy, stretched out like domestic animals, sleeping in the sunshine.

In 1804, when "Paul and Virginia" was all the rage, the interior was hung with a paper representing the principal scenes of the novel. Here were pictured negroes gathering cocoa, which beverage did not play a very important part in this establishment, in which twenty cups of chocolate were not drunk during a month. This colonial commodity was so little in demand among the inhabitants of Soulanges that a stranger who would have ventured to ask for a cup of chocolate would have embarrassed good Père Socquard very seriously. He might, nevertheless, have obtained a cup of a nauseous brown concoction, made from little tablets in which farina, shelled almonds, and brown sugar were more prominent than white sugar and cocoa, and which was sold for two sous by the village grocers, and manufactured with the end in view of ruining the commerce of this Spanish commodity.

As to coffee, Socquard simply boiled it in a utensil known to all housekeepers as the "big brown pot." He allowed the powder, plentifully mixed with chicory, to settle, and then served the decoction with the *sang-froid* worthy of a waiter in a Parisian café, in a china cup which, if thrown on the ground, would not be broken.

At that time the respect paid to sugar under the emperor was not yet done away with in the town of Soulanges, and Aglaé Socquard generously carried four pieces of sugar as large as pebbles to the grain merchant who had taken it into his head to ask for this literary beverage.

The interior decorations, which were relieved by mirrors in gilded frames and pegs upon which to hang hats and cloaks, had not been changed since the time when all Soulanges had come to admire these fascinating paintings, and a counter in imitation mahogany, upon which stood a marble figure of St. Anne, in front of it, again, two plaster vases and two lamps, which were given by Gaubertin to the beautiful Madame Socquard. A clammy coating tarnished everything, and could only be compared to that which covers old pictures which have lain forgotten in the garret.

Tables painted to imitate marble, tabourets in red Utrecht velvet, the Argand lamp attached to a chain depending from the ceiling and decked out with crystals, were part of the celebrities of the Café de la Guerre.

There, between 1802 and 1804, the bourgeois of Soulanges repaired to play dominoes and brelan, drinking little glasses of liquor and wine, picking the fruits out of the brandy in which they were preserved, and munching biscuits; for the high price of the colonial commodity had made coffee, sugar and chocolate a luxury. Punch was the great dainty, as was also a kind of tea sweetened with syrup of capellaire. These preparations were made with a sugary substance, a syrup resembling molasses, the name of which is lost, but which made the fortune of the inventor of it.

These brief details will recall their analogue to the memory of travelers; and those who have never left Paris will see in imagination the ceiling blackened by smoke of the Café de la Paix and its glasses tarnished by thousands of brown points, which will prove to them in what a state of independence the flies lived in this happy café.

The beautiful Madame Socquard, whose gallantries surpassed those of Tonsard of the Grand-I-vert, had lorded it there, dressed after the fashion of the last century. She was very partial to turbans. La Sultane had been as much the fashion under the Empire, as the Ange is to-day.

All the valley, in past times, used to come for patterns for new styles of turbans, hats with broad brims, and fur bonnets, as well as the Chinese head-dresses of the handsome cafetière, to whose luxury the big wigs of Soulanges all contributed. With her dress bodice under her arms, in the style of our mothers, so proud of their imperial graces, Junie (she called herself Junie!) did the honors of the Socquard house. Her husband owed to her the vineyard, the house they lived in, and Tivoli. Monsieur Lupin's father had done many foolish things for beautiful Junie Socquard.

These details, and the secret recipe which Socquard had for his special wine, will amply explain why his name and that of the Café de la Paix had become so popular; but there were many other reasons besides for this popularity. At Tonsard's and the other inns throughout the valley wine alone could be obtained; while from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, a circumference of six miles, Socquard's café was the only one where you could play billiards and drink the punch so admirably prepared by that famous innkeeper. Here alone were spread out to public view the wines of strange countries, fine liquors and brandied fruits.

This name was sounded almost every day throughout the valley, and was united with the voluptuous ideas of men whose stomachs are more sensitive than their hearts. To these causes was also joined the privilege of being an integral part of the Soulanges fête. In a superior manner, the Café de la Paix was for the city what the inn of the Grand-I-vert was for the country around—a warehouse of venom; it served as a transmission of tittle-tattle between Ville-aux-Fayes and the valley. The Grand-I-vert furnished all the milk and cream to the Café de la Paix, and Tonsard's two sons were in daily communication with this establishment.

For Socquard, the Soulanges square was but an appendage to his café. The innkeeper went from door to door, chatting with every one; wearing in summer but a pair of pantaloons and a shirt, merely buttoned, according to the fashion of the innkeepers in small towns. He was notified by the people with whom he was chatting if any one entered his establishment, to which he would wend his way, heavily and regretfully.

These details ought to convince those Parisians who have never left their own quarter the difficulty, or, better still, the impossibility of hiding the slightest thing in the valley of the Avonne, from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. There exists in country places no solution of continuity; little distances apart are to be found inns like the Grand-I-vert, or cafés like La Paix, which form echoes, and where the most simple actions, accomplished in the greatest secrecy, are repeated as if by magic. This social gossip takes the place of the electric telegraph; it is thus that these miracles are accomplished of news learned in the wink of an eye, of unexpected disasters from a great distance.

After stopping his horse, Rigou descended from his carriage and tied the bridle to one of the door-posts of the Tivoli. Then he found the most natural pretense for listening to the discussion without seeming to do so. Placing himself between two windows, by one of which he could, by putting his head a little forward, see the people and study their gestures, he at the same time caught the drift of their loud words, which rang out from the open windows and which the great calm of the evening made more audible.

"And if I were to say to Père Rigou that your brother Nicolas was running after Péchina," cried a sharp voice, "that he watches her at all hours, that she will pass under his nose to your lord, he will know how to upset your affairs, you pack of knaves at the Grand-I-vert."

"If you should do anything so silly, Aglaé," replied Marie Tonsard's shrill voice, "you do not know what a revenge I will take upon you. Do not meddle with Nicolas's affairs, any more than with mine and Bonnebault's."

Marie, stimulated by her grandmother, had, as we see, followed Bonnebault; spying upon him, she had seen him, through the same window at which Rigou was stationed, whispering the most agreeable flatteries to Mademoiselle Socquard, who was so tickled that she smiled sweetly upon him. This smile had led to the scene, in the midst of which burst forth this revelation so precious to Rigou.

"Well, Père Rigou, you are degrading my property!" said Socquard, slapping the usurer on the shoulder.

The innkeeper had just come from a barn, situated at the end of his garden, from which he had been superintending the taking out of a great many public games; weighing machines, merry-go-rounds, balancing poles, etc., etc., to transport them to the places they would occupy at Tivoli. He had walked noiselessly, as he wore his yellow leather slippers, the low price of which caused them to be sold in great quantities throughout the provinces.

"If you have any fresh lemons, I will have a lemonade, as the evening is very hot," replied Rigou.

"But who is bawling thus?" asked Socquard, looking through the window and seeing his daughter quarreling with Marie.

"They are fighting over Bonnebault," replied Rigou with a fiendish smile.

The father's wrath was in contention in Socquard's heart with his interest as innkeeper. The innkeeper judged it prudent to listen outside as Rigou was doing; while the father wanted to enter and declare that Bonnebault, full of estimable qualities in the eyes of an innkeeper, had not one single trait that would make him acceptable as the son-in-law of one of the notabilities of Soulanges. And all this, notwithstanding the fact that Socquard received very few offers of marriage for his daughter. At twenty-two years of age, his daughter, by her size and weight, ran a race with Madame Vermichel; and yet her agility was something phenomenal. Her daily occupation of standing behind the counter augmented greatly the tendency to embonpoint which Aglaé inherited from her father.

"What the devil is the matter with those girls?" asked Socquard of Rigou.

"Ah!" replied the ex-Benedictine, "it is of all the devils that which the Church has seized the oftenest."

Socquard's sole reply was to examine, on the pictures which separated the windows, the billiard cues, whose reunion hid the marks of time in the peeling plaster.

At this moment Bonnebault, coming out of the billiard room with a cue in his hand, struck Marie roughly, saying to her:

"You have made me lose my touch, but I will not miss you, and I will continue until you have put a stop to your tongue."

Socquard and Rigou judged it time to interfere, and entered the café by the door opening out into the square, and in doing so disturbed a whole army of flies. Their buzzing sounded like the distant exercise of a class of tambour players. After the first shock, these large flies, with bluish bellies, accompanied by little plaguing flies and some few great horse flies, returned to take their places again on the window-panes, where on three rows of shelves, the paint of which had disappeared under their black spots, were ranged sticky bottles with the regularity of soldiers.

Marie was crying. To be beaten before her rival by the man one loves is a humiliation to which no woman can submit, no matter in what social position she may be; and the lower she is, the more violent is the expression of her hatred. Thus Tonsard's daughter saw neither Rigou nor Socquard; she fell on a tabouret in a mournful and fierce silence, which the ex-priest stood watching.

"Go and get a fresh lemon, Aglaé," said Socquard, "and rinse a glass out yourself."

"You did well to send your daughter away," said Rigou in a low voice to Socquard, "she would have been wounded unto death perhaps."

And by a glance he showed Marie with a tabouret in her hand, which she had grasped to throw at Aglaé's head.

"Come, Marie," said Socquard, placing himself in front of her, "you must not come here to take tabourets, and if you break my glasses it is not in cow's milk that you will pay me."

"Père Socquard, your daughter is a snake and I know it; do you understand me? If you do not wish Bonnebault for a son-in-law, it is time for you to tell him to go elsewhere for his game of billiards! I hope he loses a hundred sous now."

As Marie finished her flow of words, cried out rather than spoken, Socquard took Marie by the waist and put her out doors, in spite of her cries and resistance. It was fortunate for her, for Bonnebault came out from the billiard-room, his eye flashing fire.

"This will not end like this!" cried Marie Tonsard.

"Get out of here," screamed Bonnebault, whom Viollet was holding 'round the waist to prevent him from committing some brutality. "Go to the devil, or I will never speak or look at you again."

"You?" said Marie, throwing a furious glance at Bonnebault. "Give me back my money first, and I will leave thee to Mademoiselle Socquard, if she is rich enough to keep you."

Then Marie, frightened at seeing Alcide Socquard hardly able to hold Bonnebault, who made a tigerish bound after her, saved herself by running out into the road.

Rigou put Marie in his carriage, in order to restrain Bonnebault's anger, whose voice could be heard as far as the Soudry's house; then, after hiding Marie, he returned to drink his lemonade, examining the group formed by Plissoud, Amaury, Viollet, and the waiter, who were all trying to calm Bonnebault.

"Come, it is your turn to play, hussar!" said Amaury, who was a little man, a blonde and very anxious looking.

"Besides, she has flown," said Viollet.

If any one had ever expressed surprise, it would have been Plissoud, at the moment in which he perceived the usurer of Blangy more occupied with him, Plissoud, than with the dispute of the two girls. In spite of himself, the hussar showed in his face the astonishment a man feels who suddenly finds that a supposed enemy is inclined to be friendly. He returned to the game.

"Adieu, Socquard," said the usurer.

"I will bring your carriage," replied the innkeeper; "take your time."

"How am I going to find out what those men are saying, who are playing pool?" Rigou asked himself, as he saw a boy's face in the mirror.

This boy was a boy of many occupations. He tended the vines for Socquard, he swept the café, the billiard-room, he tended the garden, he sprinkled the Tivoli's sanded floor; and all for twenty francs a year. He was always without a vest, except on grand occasions, when his only costume was a pair of pantaloons in blue cloth, great shoes, a waistcoat of striped velvet, in front of which he wore a great white apron when he was waiting in the billiard-room or café. This apron, with its strings, was the insignia of his functions. This boy had been hired by the innkeeper at the last fair; for in this

valley, as throughout Burgundy, servants took a place by the year, exactly as they bought horses.

"What is your name?" Rigou asked him.

"Michel, at your service," replied the boy.

"Do you not see Père Fourchon here sometimes?"

"Two or three times a week, with Monsieur Vermichel, who always gives me a few sous to warn him when his wife is coming down upon them."

"He is a good man, is Père Fourchon, well educated and possessed of good sense," said Rigou, paying for his lemonade and quitting the café, disgusted to see his carriage standing before the door with Socquard at his horse's head.

As he was getting into the carriage, Rigou perceived the pharmacist and hailed him with: "Ohé! Monsieur Vermut!" Recognizing the rich man, Vermut slackened his pace. Rigou joined him and whispered in his ear:

"Do you think there is a reactive which could disorganize the tissue of the skin to the point of producing a real illness, such as whitlow on the finger?"

"If Monsieur Gourdon is willing to cooperate, yes," replied the little savant.

"Vermut, not a word on the subject, or we will get in trouble; but speak to Monsieur Gourdon on the subject, and tell him to come and see me to-morrow; I will procure him the delicate operation of cutting an index."

Then the ex-mayor, leaving the little druggist dumfounded, stepped into his carriage and took his place alongside of Marie Tonsard.

"Well, little viper," he said to her, taking her arm, after he had attached his reins to a ring on the front of the leather apron which shut in the front seat, and had let the horse go his own gait; "you think you can keep Bonnebault by giving way to such paroxysms of violence? If you were wise, you would help on a marriage with this great tub of foolishness, and then you could revenge yourself."

Marie could not prevent a smile as she replied: "Ah! but you are wicked! Indeed you are master of us all!"

"Listen, Marie, I love the peasants; but none of you must throw yourselves between my teeth and my game. Your brother Nicolas, as Aglaé said, is following Péchina. This is not the thing, for I am protecting this child; she will inherit from me thirty thousand francs, and I want to marry her well. I know that Nicolas, aided by your sister Catherine, nearly killed the little one this morning. You will see your brother and your sister, and tell them this: 'If you leave Péchina alone, Rigou will save Nicolas from the conscription.'"

"You are the devil himself!" cried Marie. "They say that you have signed a compact with him. Is it possible?"

"Yes," replied Rigou, gravely.

"The old people have told us this, but I did not believe it."

"He has guaranteed me that no attempt against my life shall be successful; that I shall never be robbed; that I shall live a hundred years without sickness; that I shall succeed in everything; and that, until the hour of my death, I shall be as young as a cock of two years."

"That is easily seen," said Marie. "Well, then, it will be devilishly easy for you to save my brother."

"If he wishes it; for he must lose a finger," replied Rigou. "I will tell him in what way."

"What! you are taking the upper road?" said Marie.

"At night I no longer pass by here," said the ex-monk.

"You are afraid of the cross?"

"Perhaps I am, sly one!" replied this diabolical personage.

They had reached a spot in which the district road was crossed by a slight elevation of ground. This cut formed two steep declivities, such as are often seen on French roads.

At the end of this gorge, which was about a hundred feet in length, the roads to Ronquerolles and Cerneux formed a cross-road in which stood a cross. From one or the other slope, a man might stand and kill any passer-by, with the more facility that this eminence being covered with vines, a malefactor would find it very easy to hide in the vines and bushes which grew in wild profusion on the sides. You could easily understand why the usurer, always prudent, never passed by there at night; the place was called "Les Clos de la Croix." There was never a more favorable place in which to wreak a vengeance or commit a murder; for the road to Ronquerolles led to the bridge over the Avonne, and the road to Cerneux spread out toward the royal road, so that between the four roads, to Aigues, to Ville-aux-Fayes, to Ronquerolles and Cerneux, a murderer could choose a retreat and leave those who were following him in great uncertainty.

"I will put you down at the entrance to the village," said Rigou, as he perceived the first houses in Blangy.

"Because of Annette, old coward!" cried Marie. "Are you going to send her away soon? It is three years now since you took her. The most amusing part of it is, that your old woman keeps well! God will revenge her!"

XVII.

THE TRIUMVIRATE OF VILLE-AUX-FAYES.

THE prudent usurer had ordered his wife and Jean to go to bed early and to rise with the dawn, proving to them that the house would never be attacked if he watched until midnight and rose late. Not only had he secured his tranquillity from seven in the evening until five in the morning, but he had also accustomed his wife and Jean to respect his sleep and that of the Agar's, whose chamber was situated back of his.

Thus, the next morning, about half-past six, Madame Rigou, who herself cared for the poultry-yard, conjointly with Jean, knocked timidly at her husband's chamber door.

"Monsieur Rigou," she said, "you told me to waken you."

The sound of this voice, the attitude of the woman, her fearful and obedient air to an order, the execution of which might be badly received, depicted the profound abnegation in which this poor creature lived, and the affection she still bore for this habitual tyrant.

"All right," cried Rigou.

"Must I awaken Annette?" she asked.

"No, let her sleep! She has been up nearly all night!" said he, seriously.

This man was always serious, even when he permitted himself to joke. Annette had, in fact, secretly opened the door to Sibilet, to Fourchon and to Catherine Tonsard, each one coming at different times, between eleven and one o'clock.

Ten minutes later, Rigou, dressed more carefully than usual, descended and greeted his wife with a "Good-morning, my old woman!" which made her happier than if she had seen General de Montcornet at her feet.

"Jean," he said to the ex-lay brother, "do not leave the house, do not let me be robbed. You will lose more than I will."

It was in mingling kindness with rebuffs, hopes and blows, that this knowing egotist had succeeded in making these three slaves as faithful, as attached as dogs.

Rigou, as usual, taking the road, the upper one, in order to avoid Les Clos de la Croix, reached the Soulanges square about eight o'clock.

Just as he was tying the reins to the turnstile nearest to the little door with its three steps, the shutter opened. Soudry showed his pock-marked face, which the expression of two little black eyes rendered artful.

"Let us commence by breaking a crust, for we will not breakfast at Ville-aux-Fayes before an hour."

He softly called a servant, as young and pretty as Rigou's, who came downstairs noiselessly, and whom he told to serve them a slice of ham and some bread; then he started off to bring the wine from the cellar himself.

Rigou gazed around this dining-room for at least the hundredth time, with its oaken floor, its molded ceiling, decorated with fine coats of arms beautifully painted, wainscoted half-way up, ornamented by a handsome porcelain stove, and having a magnificent clock on the mantel, all heirlooms of Mademoiselle Laguerre. The backs of the chairs were shaped like lyres, the wood painted and varnished in white, upholstered in green morocco and studded with gold-headed nails. The parquet had a tapestry design, and attested to the great care of the old-fashioned chambermaids, by its luster from assiduous rubbings.

"Bah! this costs too much," Rigou said to himself. "You can eat just as well in my room as here, and I have the income from the money which it would cost me to furnish in this useless splendor. Where is Madame Soudry?" he asked of the mayor of Soulanges, who appeared just then with a bottle of old wine in his hands.

"She is sleeping!"

Jeannette, still in her night-cap, with a short skirt and bare feet thrust into slippers, having put on a little peasant's waist, over which she had crossed a white kerchief, which did not entirely hide her fresh and girlish charms, appeared not a whit less appetizing than the ham, so highly praised by Soudry. Small, rounded, her bare arms hung down and terminated in small dimpled hands, with short and well-formed fingers denoting a rich blood. She was a true type of a Burgundy peasant girl; rosy, but white at the temples, neck and ears; with ruddy hair, the corners of her eyes curving upward toward the ears, open nostrils, a sensual mouth, and a little soft down upon the cheeks; with a lively expression, tempered by a modest and misleading bearing, which made her a model of a frivolous servant.

"How is Madame Rigou? Is she sleeping?" said Soudry.

"She awakens with our cock," replied Rigou; "but she goes to bed with the chickens. As for me, I stay up reading 'Le Constitutionnel' at night, and in the morning my wife lets me sleep; she would not come into my room for the world."

"Here it is just the other way," replied Jeannette. "Madame stays up with the city people playing; there are sometimes fifteen in the salon. Monsieur goes to bed at eight o'clock, and we get up at daybreak."

"That seems to you different," said Rigou, "but in reality it is the same thing. Well, my dear child, come to my house; I will send Annette here. It will be the same thing, and yet it will be different."

"You old rascal," said Soudry; "you shock me."

"How is that, gendarme? You only want one horse in your stable? Well, each one to his taste."

Jeannette, upon an order from her master, left the room to get his out-door clothes ready.

"You have promised to marry her upon the death of your wife, I suppose?" asked Rigou.

"At our time of life, no other means is left to us," replied Soudry.

"With an ambitious girl, it would be a question of becoming a widower very quickly," replied Rigou, "especially if Madame Soudry talked very much before Jeannette of her manner of having the stairs washed down."

These words made both the husbands thoughtful. When Jeannette came to announce that "all was ready," Soudry said: "Come and assist me!" which made the ex-Benedictine smile.

A quarter of an hour later, Soudry, all in his Sunday best, stepped into the wicker carriage, and the two friends drove along the lake road in the direction of Ville-aux-Fayes.

"Look at that chateau!" said Rigou when they reached the spot from which the chateau could be plainly seen.

The old Revolutionary said this in a tone of voice which revealed the hatred which the middle class of country people harbored against the owners of great tracts of land and beautiful chateaux.

"But, as long as I live, I hope to see it standing," said the old gendarme. "Count de Soulanges was my general. He did me a good turn; he managed my pension very cleverly for me; and then he lets Lupin manage the estate for him, out of which Lupin's father made his fortune. After Lupin dies it will be another, and, as long as there are De Soulanges, they will respect this old custom. Those people are good fellows; they let each one earn what he can and they do not grumble."

"Ah! but the general has three children who may not agree to all this at his death. Some day or another the husband of the daughter, and the sons, will sell by auction this lead and iron mine to those speculators we know of, who are so anxious to buy it."

The Chateau de Soulanges stood out, as if in bold defiance of robbery.

"Ah! yes, in those times they built well!" cried Monsieur Soudry. "But Monsieur le Comte is economizing his income at this moment, in order to make the Chateau de Soulanges an entailed estate."

"Friend," replied Rigou, "majorats sometimes fall through."

This interesting topic once exhausted, the two bourgeois started in to talk of the relative merits of their respective girls.

This subject lasted until they saw before them the public building over which Gaubertin reigned, and which excited enough curiosity to force a digression.

The name of Ville-aux-Fayes, though odd, is easily explained by the corruption of the name (in Low Latin *villa in fago*, or the manor-house in the woods). This name tells us that formerly a forest covered the delta formed by the Avonne as it flowed into the river, which unites five leagues farther away with the Yonne. A Frank had no doubt built a fortress on the hill, which, at that point, turns and slopes gradually into the long plain where Leclercq, the deputy, had purchased his land. By dividing this delta by a long and wide ditch, the conqueror had made a formidable position for himself, and an essentially seignorial estate, handy for collecting the tolls on the bridges and watching over the rights of the fees demanded from the millers.

Such is the history of the commencement of Ville-aux-Fayes. Wherever a feudal or religious domain was established, it brought with it interests, inhabitants, and later, cities, when the location was found to be a good one for drawing, developing and founding industries. The process discovered by Jean Rouvet for floating the lumber, and which necessitated finding suitable points at which to intercept it, made Ville-aux-Fayes, which, until then, compared to De Soulanges, was but a village. Ville-aux-Fayes became the principal depot for the lumber which, for a stretch of twelve miles, bordered both sides of the river. The work

demanded by the gathering up and the collecting of lost piles of lumber, and the style of rafts that the Yonne carried to the Seine, necessitated a great number of workmen. The population were incited to proficiency, and thus their commerce was begun. By this means Ville-aux-Fayes, which could not count six hundred inhabitants at the end of the sixteenth century, numbered two thousand in 1790, and Gaubertin had carried the count to 4,000. This was how.

When the Legislative Assembly decreed a new conscription of the territory, Ville-aux-Fayes, which found itself situated at a distance, geographically, which necessitated a sous-préfecture, was chosen in preference to Soulanges for the capital of the district. The sous-préfecture called for a court, and all the employés required by the work of a capital. The growth of the Parisian population, in augmenting the value and the quantity of wood used for fuel, necessarily augmented the importance of the commerce of Ville-aux-Fayes. Gaubertin had invested his fortune in this new need, divining the influence of the proclamation of peace on the Parisian population, which from 1815 to 1825 had increased by one-third.

The configuration of Ville-aux-Fayes was indicated by that of the ground. The two lines of the promontory were closed in by two harbors. The dam for stopping the lumber was at the foot of the hill, which was covered by the Soulanges forest. Between this dam and the city there was a faubourg. The lower town, built on the largest part of the delta, jutted out into the Avonne lake.

Above the lower town were five hundred houses, with little gardens, which stood on an elevation. These had been under cultivation for three hundred years. They surrounded the promontory on three sides, and had a magnificent view of the multiplicity of aspects furnished by the sparkling sheet of the Avonne lake, encumbered by rafts in course of construction, and, on the shores, by great piles of lumber. The waters of the river, filled with lumber, and the pretty cascades of the Avonne, which were higher than the river where it emptied, setting the vanes of the mills and the wheels of some factories in motion, formed a very animated picture, much more picturesque from the fact that it was framed by the green masses of the forests and that the long valley of les Aigues formed a magnificent contrast to the dark background which dominated Ville-aux-Fayes.

In front of this vast panorama, the royal post-road, which crossed the lake a quarter of a mile below Ville-aux-Fayes, was broken off at the commencement of an avenue of poplars, where a small faubourg was located, grouped around a horse mart, attached to a large farm. The cantonal road also made a detour to reach the bridge, where it rejoined the highway.

Gaubertin had built himself a house on a portion of the delta, with the idea of forming a square which would make the lower town as beautiful as the upper town. It was a modern stone house, with a rounding balcony, Venetian blinds, prettily painted windows, without any other ornament than a Grecian border under the cornice of a gabled roof; one story surmounted by the garrets, a large courtyard in front, and, behind, an English garden, lapped by the waters of the Avonne. The elegance of this house forced the sous-prefect, lodged transiently in a kennel, to come to the front in a hotel which the department was forced to build upon the insistance of the deputies Leclercq and Ronquerolles. The city hall had just been built, also a new court house, so that the city of Ville-aux-Fayes owed to the energetic genius of its mayor a line of very imposing modern buildings. The militia had built an armory, to complete the four sides of the square.

These changes, over which the inhabitants expressed great pride, were due to Gaubertin's influence, who, a few days before, had received the cross of the Legion of Honor, on the occasion of the approaching feast of the king. In a city thus constituted, and of such modern creation, there was neither aristocracy nor nobility. Hence, the bourgeois of Ville-aux-Fayes, proud of their independence, espoused the quarrel which had broken out between the peasants and a count of the Empire, who took sides with the Restoration. For them the oppressors were the oppressed. The spirit of this commercial city was so well known to the Government that they had appointed as sous-préfect a man of a very conciliating spirit, a pupil of his uncle, the famous Lupeaulx, a man used to transactions, familiar with the needs of all governments, and whom the puritan politicians, who are worse themselves, called men of corruption.

The interior of the house had been decorated in the insipid taste of modern luxury. The paper was in rich tints with gilded borders, bronze lusters, mahogany furniture, astral lamps, round marble-topped tables, white china with a thin

thread-like golden border for dinner, chairs with red morocco seats, and water-colored pictures in the dining-room, blue satin furniture in the salon, all excessively cold and flat, but which seemed to the good people of Ville-aux-Fayes the last efforts of an extravagant luxury. Madame Gaubertin played an elegant rôle with great effect. She put on little mincing airs. At forty-five she took upon herself the prim carriage of a mayoress sure of herself and who held her own court.

Rigou's house, that of Soudry and that of Gaubertin, were they not, for those who are acquainted with France, the perfect representation of a village, a little town, and a sous-préfecture?

Without being by any means a great man or a man of talent, Gaubertin had the appearance of one; he owed the justness of his views as well as his malice to a greedy avarice. He did not desire fortune for his wife, nor his two daughters, nor his son, nor for himself, nor for the consideration which money gives; outside of his vengeance, which forced him to live, he loved the game of money like Nucingen, who handled, as they tell us, gold in both pockets at once. Business was this man's life; and though he had a full stomach, he displayed the activity of a man with an empty stomach. He resembled a valet on the stage. His intrigues, his tricks, his coups to organize, his deceits, his commercial financiering, bills to make out, money to receive, scenes, interested disagreements, stimulated him, sometimes putting his blood in circulation, and sometimes spreading the bile throughout his system. And he went and he came, on horseback, in a carriage, by water, in the wind and rain, to the auction sales, to Paris, always thinking, holding a thousand strings in his hands at once and never getting them tangled.

Quick, decided in his movements as in his ideas, small, short, thick set, his nose thin, his eye bright, his ear erect, he looked like a hunting dog. His face was tawny, brown and round, from which shot out two red ears. He always wore a little cap. His nose was retroussé, his pinched lips never seemed to open to utter a welcome word. His tufted whiskers formed two black shining bushes below two red cheek bones and were lost in his cravat; curly hair, streaked black and white, like the wig of an old magistrate, was twisted as if by the violence of the fire which burned in his brain, and which sparkled in his gray eyes, enveloped by circular wrinkles which doubtless came from his habit of always winking. Dry, lean and nervous, he had the hairy, hooked, rough hands of men who pay in their own person. This tout-ensemble pleased those with whom he had dealings, for he always enveloped himself in a deceiving gayety. He knew how to say a great deal without telling anything he wished to conceal. He wrote little, to be able to deny what was unfavorable to him in what he let escape him. His writings were kept by a cashier, an honest man, whom people of Gaubertin's character know how to get rid of, and of whom, in their own interests, they make the first dupes.

When the little wicker carriage showed itself, about eight o'clock, in the avenue which ran along the river, Gaubertin, in his cap, boots and coat, hurried to the door. He suddenly quickened his pace as he knew very well that Rigou did not put himself out, except for something very important.

"Good-day! good-morning! good paunch full of meal and wisdom," said he, giving them, in turn, a little tap on their stomachs. "We are going to talk business, and we will talk it, glass in hand, by my faith! That is the true way!"

"In this way you should become fat," said Rigou.

"I give myself a great deal of trouble. I am not, like you, confined to the house, made captive there, like an old rascal. Ah! you are well fixed, by my faith! You can sit, with your back to the fire, in an armchair; business comes to you. But come in! You are welcome for the time you will remain."

A domestic in blue livery, trimmed in red embroidery, came and took the horse by the bridle to lead him to the courtyard in which were situated the kitchens and stables.

Gaubertin left his two guests alone for a few moments while he went to give the necessary orders for breakfast. They walked up and down the garden, where Gaubertin soon rejoined them.

"Well, my little wolves," he said, rubbing his hands together, "the soldiers were seen setting out at daybreak in the direction of Conches. They were doubtless going to arrest the condemned poachers who were caught in the act. In the name 'of the Little Man!' it is commencing to get warm! It is getting warm! By this time the boys must be safe under arrest," he said, taking his watch out and looking at it.

"Probably," said Rigou.

"Well, what do they say in the village? What have they made up their minds to do?"

"But what is there for them to decide?" asked Rigou. "We count for nothing in this matter," he added, looking at Soudry.

"How for nothing? And if les Aigues is sold, on account of our combination, who will gain five or six hundred thousand francs by it? Is it me alone? I am not rich enough to lose two millions, with three children to start out in life and a wife who has no limit to her extravagance. I must have some partners. Father 'Empoigneur,' has he not a supply of funds ready? He has not a mortgage which has not a limit. He only lends on sight, to which I must respond. I put myself down for eight hundred thousand francs; my son, the judge, two hundred thousand; we count on 'l'Empoigneur' for two hundred thousand. How much can we put you down for, Père la Calotte?"

"For the rest," said Rigou, coldly.

"By Jove! I would like to have my hand where you have your heart!" said Gaubertin. "And what will you do?"

"I will do as you say. What is your plan?"

"My plan is to take at double what I will sell at half, to those who will buy in Conches, Cerneux and Blangy. Soudry will have his customers in Soulanges; and you yours here. That is not much trouble. But how do we stand between ourselves? How will we divide the great lots?"

"Mon Dieu! Nothing can be simpler," said Rigou. "Each one will take what suits him best. In the first place, I will press no one; I will take the woods with my son-in-law and Soudry. These woods are bare enough not to be a very great temptation to you. We will leave you your share in the rest. That is well worth your money, by my faith!"

"Will you sign that for us?" asked Soudry.

"The signature would be worth nothing," replied Gaubertin. "Besides, you see that I am playing a fair game; I trust entirely to Rigou. He is the one who will be the purchaser."

"That suits me," said Rigou.

"I only put one condition, and that is that I can have the little pavilion, its dependencies, and the fifty acres surrounding it. I will pay you for the acres. I will make the pavilion my country house; it will be near my woods. Madame Gaubertin—Madame Isaure, as she wants to be called—will make it her villa, as she calls it."

"I am willing," said Rigou.

"And between us," replied Gaubertin, in a low voice, after looking around on all sides, to be assured that nobody could hear them, "do you think them capable of making some bad stroke?"

"Like what?" asked Rigou, who never would consent to understand any half word.

"Well, if the most daring of the band, with an adroit hand, should send a ball whistling by the comte's ears, simply to try him?"

"He is a man to dash upon him and throttle him."

"Then Michaud—"

"Michaud would not boast much, he would spy around and finish by discovering the man, and the one who armed him."

"You are right," replied Gaubertin. "They must rebel, about thirty altogether. Some will be thrown into the galleys. Finally, they will take the scoundrels of whom we wish to rid ourselves after they have served us. You have two or three blackguards, like Tonsard and Bonnebault?"

"Tonsard will put his foot in it. I know him," said Soudry; "and we will rile him up with Vaudoyer and Courtecuisse."

"I have Courtecuisse," said Rigou.

"And I hold Vaudoyer in my hand."

"Be prudent!" cried Rigou. "Be prudent before all else!"

"Hold, 'Papa la Calotte,' do you think by chance that there would be any harm in talking over things as they happen? Is it we who make many words, who seize, who concoct idle stories, who glean? If Monsieur le Comte takes it into his head, if he subscribed with a farmer-general for the conveyance of les Aigues, in that case, good-by baskets, profits are drawn, you will lose perhaps more than I will. What we are saying is between us and for us, for I would not say a word to Vaudoyer that I could not repeat before God and man. But it is not forbidden to foresee events and to profit by them when they happen. The peasants in this canton are ready to rebel. The exactions of the general, the severities and the persecutions of Michaud and his inferiors have pushed them to the wall. To-day their business is ruined, and I wager you that there has been a skirmish with the soldiers. Upon this, let us go to breakfast."

Madame Gaubertin had just joined the guests in the garden. She was a pale woman, with long English curls falling on her cheeks, who played the virtuous-passionate rôle, who pretended to have never known love, who assailed her devotees with the platonic question, and whose most attentive admirer was the king's deputy, her "patito," as she called

him. She danced, she had youthful manners at forty-five; but she had large feet and frightful hands. She wished to be called Isaure, for in the midst of her crankiness and ridiculous notions she had the good taste to find the name of Gaubertin vulgar. Her eyes were pale, her hair of an undecided color — a kind of clayey yellow. She was taken as a model by a great many young people, who attacked the heavens with their glances in posing as angels.

"Well, messieurs," she said, saluting them, "I have strange tidings to tell you. The soldiers have returned."

"Have they taken any prisoners?"

"None. The general asked pardon for them in advance. It was granted as a favor, in commemoration of the happy anniversary of the king's return among us."

The three associates looked at one another.

"He is smarter than I thought he was, this great fat cuirassier!" said Gaubertin. "Come, let us to the table, we must console ourselves. After all, our side has not lost, it is only put back a little; this touches you now, Rigou."

Soudry and Rigou returned home disappointed, not being able to imagine anything likely to lead up to a catastrophe that would benefit them, and trusting, as Gaubertin had said to them, to chance. Like those Jacobins in the first days of the Revolution, furious, scattered by the bounty of Louis XVI., and provoking the harshness of the court in the wild hope of leading anarchy on, which meant for them fortune and power, the redoubtable adversaries of the Comte de Montcornet put their last hope in the rigor which Michaud and his guards would employ against new depredations. Gaubertin promised them his alliance without explaining to his co-operators, as he did not want them to know of his relations with Sibilet. Nothing can equal the discretion of a man of Gaubertin's character, if it is not that of an ex-gendarme and an unfrocked priest. This plot could lead up to nothing good, or better speaking, to nothing bad, except when concocted by three men of this kind, filled with hatred and interest.

XVIII.

THE VICTORY WITHOUT FIGHTING.

Madame Michaud's fears were the effect of that second sight with which real passion endows us. Our thoughts being occupied exclusively with the image of one person, the soul ends by becoming imbued with the moral world which surrounds this beloved being, and we see all things clearly. In her love, the woman experiences the presentiments which agitate her later in her maternity.

While the poor woman was listening to the confused voices which came to her across the unknown space, a scene was passing in the tap-room of the Grand-I-vert tavern which threatened her husband's life.

The early country risers had seen the soldiers from Soulanges passing by, about five o'clock in the morning, their steps directed toward Conches. This news circulated rapidly, and those who were interested in the question were surprised to learn, from those who lived farther up in the hills, that a detachment of soldiers, commanded by the lieutenant of Villeaux-Fayes, had passed by in the direction of les Aigues forest. As it was Monday, there was a still greater reason for the laborers going to the tavern; but it was also the anniversary of the return of the Bourbons, and although the usual customers at Tonsard's had really no need for this "auguste cause" (as they then called it) as a justification of their presence at the Grand-I-vert, they took advantage of the date to excuse their early presence.

They found Vaudoyer, Tonsard and his family, Godain, who was a half-partner, and an old laborer in the vineyards named Laroche. This man lived from hand to mouth. He was one of the offenders furnished by Blangy, in the kind of conscription which they had invented in order to disgust the general with his mania for verbal process. Blangy had sent in the names of three other men, eight boys and five girls, and of twelve women, whose husbands and fathers should respond. These were entirely destitute; but they were also the only ones in this condition of abject poverty.

The year 1823 had made the wine growers very rich, and 1826, should, by its promise of a rich harvest, put a deal of money in their pockets; the work which had been ordered done by the general had also circulated a goodly sum of money in the three districts which surrounded his property, and it had been a difficult matter to find, in Blangy, Conches or Cerneux, one hundred and twenty paupers. They had compromised by taking the old women, the mothers and grandmothers of those who possessed something, but who had nothing themselves—like Ton-

sard's mother. This old laborer, Laroche, was worth absolutely nothing. He did not have, like Tonsard, hot, vicious blood; he was animated by a bitter and cold hatred; he worked in silence, his looks were always fierce; labor was insupportable to him, and yet he could only live by working; his features were harsh, their expression repulsive. Notwithstanding his sixty years, he was not lacking in strength, but his back had become weak, he was stooped, and he was envious of those who owned any land. For this reason, he was looked upon without pity in the forests of les Aigues; and he gloried in useless devastations.

"Let them try to take us," said Laroche. "After Conches, they will come to Blangy. I have repeated my offense, and I am in for three months in prison."

"And what will you do against the soldiers, you old toper?" Vaudoyer asked him.

"Well, can we not cut their horses legs? They would soon fall to the earth; their guns would not be loaded, and when they see ten stout fellows against them, they would have to yield. If the three villages should rise up, or if they killed two or three soldiers, would everybody need to be guillotined? We must beat the soldiers back, as they did in Burgundy, or, for an affair like this, they will send a whole regiment against us. Ah! bah! the regiment will go away, the 'pésans' will continue to go to the forests, as they have done for years, do you see!"

"To kill in order to kill," said Vaudoyer. "It would be better to kill but one; but that in a way that would not be dangerous, and which would disgust all the 'Arminacs' of the country."

"Which one of the brigands?" asked Laroche.

"Michaud," said Courtecuisse. "Vaudoyer is right, his reasoning is great. You will see that when a guard has been put in the shadow, others will not easily be found who will remain out in the broad sun-light on sentry duty. They are there in the daytime, but they must also be there in the night time. They are demons!"

"No matter where you go," said the old woman, Tonsard's mother, who was seventy years old, and who showed her old parchment-like face, riddled with pockmarks, and out of which peered two green eyes; her dirty white hair, hanging around her face from under a red handkerchief that was knotted around her head; "wherever you go, they will find you and stop you. They will look at your bundle of fagots. If there is one branch cut off, a single switch of that naughty filbert tree, they will take away your bundle, and serve you with the process; they have said they would do it. Ah! the rascals! There is no way of catching them, and they defy you; they will soon relieve you of your wood. There are three dogs there, who are not worth two liards; let them be killed. That will not ruin France!"

"Vatel is not so very wicked yet!" said Madame Tonsard, the daughter-in-law.

"He!" cried Laroche. "He does his work as well as the others. Laughing is always good. He laughs with you; you are no better with him for that. He is the most malicious of the three. He has no heart for the poor people, like Monsieur Michaud—"

"Yes, he has a pretty wife, all the same, has this Monsieur Michaud," said Nicolas Tonsard.

"She is enceinte," said the old mother; "but if this thing continues, the poor little one will have a strange baptism when it comes."

"Oh! it is impossible to laugh with all these Parisian 'Arminacs,'" said Marie Tonsard, "and if it so pleases them they will serve you with a process, without thinking any more about it than if they had not laughed."

"You have tried to entangle some of them then?" said Courtecuisse.

"Pardi!"

"Well," said Tonsard, with a determined air, "they are men, like any others; you can make them come to you."

"By my faith, no," replied Marie, continuing her train of thought. "They do not laugh. I do not know what is the matter with them; for, after all, the bully who lives in the pavilion is married; but Vatel, Gaillard and Steingel are not. They have no one in the country, and there is not a woman who wants to have anything to do with them."

"We will see what will happen during the harvest and the vintage," said Tonsard.

"They will not prevent us from gleaning?" said the old woman.

"I don't know about that," replied Tonsard. "Groison says that Monsieur le Mayor is going to publish a ban, in which he says no one can glean without a certificate of indigence; and who is to give it to us? If it is he, he will not give us much of a one! He is also going to publish a paper, forbidding us to enter into the fields before the last bundle of sheaves is in the carts."

"This cuirassier is a thunder-clap!" cried Tonsard, enraged beyond all control.

"I only knew it yesterday, when I offered Groison a glass of wine to start his tongue wagging," said his wife.

"Ah! there is a lucky man!" said Vaudoyer. "They built him a house, they gave him a good wife, he has a good income, he is lodged like a king. As for me, I was king's forester for twenty years, and all I got were colds and rheumatism."

"Yes, he is lucky," said Godain; "he has money."

"Here we stay like fools that we are. Let us at least go and see what is happening at Conches; they will not hold out longer than we did," exclaimed Vaudoyer.

"Let us go," cried Laroche, who was not very steady on his legs; "if I do not put one or two out of the way, I will lose my name."

"You!" said Tonsard. "You will let them take the whole district, for all you care! But, as for me, if they touch the old woman, here is my gun, and it will not miss its aim."

"Well," said Laroche, turning to Vaudoyer, "if they take one away from Conches, there will be a dead gendarme."

"He has said it, Laroche has!" cried Courtecuisse.

"He has said it," replied Vaudoyer; "he has not done it, nor will he do it. What good will it do you to get licked? Life for a life. It is better to kill Michaud."

During this scene, Catherine Tonsard had stood sentinel at the tavern door, in order to be able to warn the drinkers to be quiet if any one passed by. Notwithstanding their wine-weakened legs, they started off as soon as they got outside of the tavern, and their fighting ardor directed their steps toward Conches, following the road which, for more than a quarter of a mile, ran along the walls of les Aigues.

Conches was a true Burgundy village, boasting of only one street, through which ran the highway. The houses were built, some of bricks and some of clay, but they were all wretched-looking places. On entering by the county road from Ville-aux-Fayes, you came upon the rear part of the village, and then it did not look so wretched. Between the high-road and the Ronquerolles forests, which were a continuation of those of les Aigues and crowned the hillsides, ran a little river; and several prettily grouped cottages lent life and animation to the scene. The church and the parsonage stood apart and permitted a glimpse through the lattice fence of les Aigues park, which extended to this point. Before the church was an open space, surrounded by trees, where the conspirators from the Grand-I-vert perceived the soldiers. Thereupon they redoubled their hasty steps. At this moment three men on horseback were seen coming out of the gateway toward Conches, and the peasants recognized the general, his servant, and Michaud the head guard, who dashed forward at a gallop toward the square. Tonsard and his companions reached there a few moments after them. The delinquents, men and women, had made no resistance; they stood between the five gendarmes from Soulanges and the fifteen others from Ville-aux-Fayes. All the village was gathered there. The children, the fathers and mothers of the prisoners, came and went, bringing them the things which they had need of to enable them to pass their time in prison. It was a curious enough sight, this exasperated lot of countrymen, as silent as though they had taken no part in it. The old and young women were the only ones who were talking. The children and the young girls had perched themselves upon the piles of lumber in order to see better.

"They chose their time well, these guillotine hussars! They have come on a feast day!"

"Are you going to let them take your man away like that? What are you going to do for three months; the best part of the year too, when day's work pays the best?"

"They are the robbers!" replied the woman, gazing at the gendarmes in a menacing manner.

"What is the matter with you, old woman? What are you bawling like that for?" said the quartermaster. "Let me tell you that it will not take long to put you under lock and key, if you attempt to injure us."

"I said nothing," the woman hastened to reply with a humble pitiful look.

"I heard you make a proposal a little while ago for which I can make you sweat."

"Come, come, my children, be calm!" said the mayor of Conches, who was also the postmaster. "What can you do? These men are in command; you must obey them."

"That is true, it is the bourgeois of les Aigues who are to blame. But patience!"

At that moment the general reached the square, and his arrival excited some

murmurs, which did not worry him much. He went at once to the lieutenant who was in command of the soldiers from Ville-aux-Fayes, and after having spoken a few words to him he took a paper from his pocket and handed it to him. The officer turned toward the men and said to them:

"Free your prisoners. The general has obtained the king's pardon for them."

Just then General de Montcornet was conversing with the mayor of Conches; but after a few moments of conversation in a low voice, the latter turned and addressed himself to the delinquents, who had expected to sleep that night in prison, and who found themselves filled with astonishment at their liberation. He said them:

"My friends, thank Monsieur le Comte; it is to him that you owe the remission of your sentence. He has asked your pardon at Paris and obtained it for the anniversary of the return of the king. I hope that in future you will conduct yourselves better toward a man who conducts himself so generously toward you, and that you will, moreover, respect his property. Vive le roi."

And the peasants cried out, "Vive le roi!" with great enthusiasm, so as not to cry out: "Vive le Comte de Montcornet!"

This scene had been shrewdly decided upon by the general, in accord with the prefect and the king's deputy; for their idea had been to show firmness in order to stimulate the local authorities and to subdue the spirit of the country people, and at the same time to show kindness when the question became delicate. In truth, resistance at this time threw the Government into a very embarrassing position. As Laroche had said, "They could not guillotine a whole district."

The general had invited the mayor of Conches, the lieutenant and the quartermaster to breakfast. The conspirators from Blangy remained behind in the Conches tavern, where the freed delinquents were employed drinking up the money which had been given them to live in prison upon.

Going out by the Conches gateway, the comte conducted his three guests by the forest road, in order to show them the traces of the havoc, and that they could form their own judgment on the importance of the question.

At the same moment that Rigou was returning to Blangy, the comte, the comtesse, Emile Blondet, the lieutenant, the quartermaster, and the mayor of Conches had just finished dining in the grand and luxurious room, where Bouret's splendor was surpassed, and which had been described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan.

"It would be a great pity to abandon such a home as this," said the lieutenant, who had never visited Aigues before, and to whom everything had been shown, and who, in looking through a glass of champagne, had remarked the admirable grace of the nude nymphs who were holding up the frescoes on the ceiling.

"Indeed, we will defend ourselves here until death," said Blondet.

"If I may say so," replied the lieutenant, glancing at the quartermaster as though binding him to silence, "the general's enemies are not all in the country."

The brave lieutenant was softened by the splendor of the breakfast, by this magnificent service, by this imperial luxury, which surpassed that of the opera singer, and Blondet had spoken some entrancing words which had stimulated him as much as the chivalric toasts to which he had responded.

"How can I have any enemies?" said the general, astonished.

"He, who is so good!" added the comtesse.

"He is in the black books of our mayor, Monsieur Gaubertin, and in order to live in peace, he should become reconciled to him."

"With him!" cried the comte. "Do you not know that he was formerly my steward? He is a rascal!"

"He is no longer a rascal," replied the lieutenant; "he is the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes!"

"Our lieutenant is witty," said Blondet. "It is clear that a mayor is essentially an honest man."

The lieutenant, seeing that after what the comte had said it would be impossible to enlighten him, dropped the conversation on the subject.

XIX.

THE FOREST AND THE HARVEST.

THE scene at Conches was productive of much good, and on their side the faithful guards of the comte watched carefully that only dead wood was carried from the Aigues forests; but, for more than twenty years, this forest had been so well worked by the inhabitants that there only remained green wood; which they made it their business to kill, for their winter use, by a very simple process, and which could only be discovered

when too late. Tonsard would send his mother into the forest. The forester would see her enter; he knew just where she must come out, and he watched to see her fagot. He found it only composed of dry twigs, fallen branches, dried and broken palms; and she grumbled, and complained of having to go so far, at her age, to obtain a miserable pile of twigs. But what she did not say was, that she had gone into the thickest underbrush; that she had loosened the stalk of a young tree, and had lifted the bark just at the spot where it joins the trunk, cutting around like a ring; then she had put the moss and the leaves back as she had found them, making it impossible to discover this annular incision made, not by the hedging bill, but by a rupture which resembled that made by those gnawing and destructive animals named, according to the country, tunnies, wood-worms and white-worms, and which are the first stage of the May-bug.

This worm is very dainty about the bark of trees; it lodges between the bark and sap-wood, and gnaws, going round and round the trunk. If the tree is thick enough so that the worm will have passed into its second stage, that of the larvæ—in which condition it will sleep until its second resurrection—before making the circle of the tree complete, the tree will be saved; for as long as there is a spot in the tree covered by which the sap can be retained, the tree will grow. To know how intimately entomology is connected with agriculture, with horticulture and all the products of the earth, it is sufficient to explain that all the great naturalists, like Latreille, the Count Degrau, Klugg of Berlin, Gené of Turin, etc., etc., have all discovered that the greater part of known insects are nourished at the expense of vegetation; that the Coleoptera, the catalogue of which was published by Monsieur Dejean, accounts for twenty-seven thousand species, and, notwithstanding the most ardent researches of the entomologists of all countries, there is an enormous quantity of species of which the triple transformations which distinguish all insects are not known; and that not only has each plant its own particular insect, but that each terrestrial product, no matter how twisted by human industry, has its own also. Thus the hemp and the flax, after having served, either as a covering, or for hanging men, becomes writing paper, and those who write or read a great deal are familiar with the ways of an insect called "pou du papier," of a marvelous gait and form. It undergoes its unknown transformations in a ream of paper, no matter how carefully cared for, and you can see it running and jumping in its shining dress like talc or spar: it is an ablette which steals.

Thus, while waiting for the harvest and the gleaning, about fifty old women were delegated to imitate the work of the wood worm at the base of five or six trees, which would doubtless be dead by spring and no longer covered with leaves; and they were chosen in the most inaccessible spots. Who gave them this secret? No one. Courtecuisse had complained one day in the tavern, expressing great surprise that an oak tree had died in his garden. This oak had commenced by drooping, and he had suspected the wood-worm; for he, Courtecuisse, knew the habits of these worms well, and when a worm was at the base of a tree the tree was lost. And he initiated his listeners into the mysteries of the workings of this worm. The old women set themselves to this work of destruction with the mystery and skillfulness of fairies, and they were urged on by the desperate measures which the mayor of Blangy had taken, and which he had recommended to the mayors in the adjoining districts. The foresters issued a proclamation, where it was said that no one would be allowed to reap or to glean, except with a certificate of indigence given him by the mayor of the district in which he lived. The landed proprietors greatly admired General de Montcornet's and the prefect's conduct; and they said that if all the social celebrities, instead of passing their time in Paris, would come and live on their estates and listen to the wants of their tenants, the results would be most advantageous.

In fact, the general and his wife, assisted by Abbé Brossette, did endeavor to be charitable. They tried to reason and to demonstrate by incontestable results that if their people would only apply themselves to legitimate labor they would gain more than by their pilfering. They gave out flax to be spun and paid well for it; then the comtesse had it manufactured into cloth, to make aprons and table-cloths and chemises for the needy. The comte undertook to ameliorate the condition of the laborers, and he only employed such men as lived in the neighboring districts. Sibilet had charge of these details, while Abbé Brossette pointed out the truly needy to the comtesse and often brought them to her. Madame de Montcornet held her charitable audiences in the large anteroom which opened out on the terrace, paved in white and red marble, with

a great porcelain stove, and furnished with long benches covered with red velvet.

Here it was that one morning old Tonsard's mother led her grandchild Catherine, "who had to make," she said, "a confession which was frightful for the honor of a poor, but honest family." While she spoke, Catherine held aloof, her head hanging and her eyes red from weeping. She related, when questioned, the terrible fix in which she found herself, and which she had confided to her grandmother. Her mother would chase her out of the house; her father, a man of honor, would kill her. If she only had a thousand francs, a poor laborer named Godain would marry her; he knew all, and he loved her like a brother; he would buy some ground and build a cottage. Her story was very touching. The comtesse promised the sum required upon the consummation of the marriage. Michaud's and Groison's happy marriages had been brought about by encouragement. Then this wedding would be a good example for the country people, and would stimulate them to better behavior. The marriage between Catherine Tonsard and Godain was arranged by means of the thousand francs promised by the comtesse.

The country was quiet. Groison made very satisfactory reports. The crimes seemed to have ceased; and, perhaps, in fact, the condition of the country and its inhabitants would have changed completely, had it not been for Gaubertin's bitter avidity, for the bourgeois's plots of the first society of Soulanges, and Rigou's intrigues, who blew upon the hearts of the peasants like a bellows on a forge, inciting them to hatred and crime.

The foresters complained of finding constantly cut branches at the foot of the slope, put there with the evident intention of preparing the wood for winter, and they watched for the authors of these crimes, without being able to apprehend them. The comte, assisted by Groison, had given certificates of indigence to but thirty or forty worthy poor of the district; but the mayors of the surrounding districts had been less difficult to deal with. The more forgiving the comte had shown himself to be in the affair at Conches, the more severe he had resolved to be in the time of the gleaning, which had really degenerated into wholesale robbery. He had given out that under pain of being served with a verbal process and the penalties which the court had pronounced as following such disobedience, it was forbidden to enter the fields before the sheaves had been carried away. His ordonnance, he said, only concerned his land in the district. Rigou knew the country. He had rented his ground in portions, to people who knew how to take care of their own harvest; and he made them pay him in grain. The other proprietors being peasants, there was no trouble anticipated there. The comte had ordered Sibilet to so arrange with his farmers as to cut the grain on each farm one after another, and making all the harvesters go back over the farms, instead of dismissing them, the latter method preventing any watching. The comte himself, accompanied by Michaud, went to see how things were progressing. City people cannot imagine what this gleaning means to the inhabitants of the country. Their passion is unexplainable. For there are women who will abandon well paid work to go and glean. The grain which they gather in this way seems better to them, and gives to this most substantial nourishment a great attraction. Mothers bring their little children, their girls and their boys; the most brokendown of the old people drag themselves there, and naturally those who are fairly well-to-do affect poverty. They put on rags, in which to glean. The comte and Michaud, on horseback, were present at the first entry of this ragged crowd into the first fields of the first farm. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. The month of August was very hot, the sky was without a cloud, as blue as a periwinkle; the ground was burning, the grain singeing. The harvesters worked, their faces broiling under the reflected rays, upon a hard and flinty ground, in a complete silence, their shirts dripping with perspiration, drinking the water contained in stone bottles which hung at their sides.

At the end of the field which was being harvested, and in which stood the carts ready to be filled with sheaves, stood about a hundred poor creatures, who certainly went far ahead of the most hideous conceptions of Murillo, de Teniers, and painters of their style; and even Callot's figures, that painter of misery, had never realized such misery as theirs. Their legs were brown, their heads bald, their rags filthy—the colors of which were curiously blended. At the same time, their expressions were uneasy, idiotic and savage. These figures enjoyed, over the immortal color-compositions of Callot, the eternal advantage which nature holds over art. There were among them old women, children as silent as soldiers under arms, grandchildren who quivered like animals in expectation of their food.

The characteristics of childhood and old age were obliterated by a covetous ferocity — keen for others' goods, which became theirs by waste. All their eyes were eager, their gestures menacing; but they kept silent in the presence of the comte, the forester and head forester. The landed proprietor, the farmers, the laborers and the poor were all here represented; the social question presented itself clearly, for hunger had called forth these challenging figures. The sun brought out, in bold relief, all their hardened features and the wrinkled faces; it burned the bare feet soiled with dust. There were among them children without shirts, hardly covered by a torn blouse; blonde hair full of straws, hay, and pine-needles.

This sad picture was distressing to an old soldier, whose heart was very kind. The general said to Michaud:

"That makes me very sad. You must know the great importance of these measures, in order to be able to persist in them."

"If each landowner would imitate you, would live on his estate and do the good that you are doing on yours, my dear general, there would be no more, I will not say poor people, for they will always be; but there would not live one being who could not live by the work of his hands."

"The mayors of Conches, Cerneux and Soulanges have sent us their poor people," said Groison, who had verified the certificates; "and that should not be."

"No, but our poor will go into those districts later on," said the comte; "it is enough, for the present, that we prevent them from carrying away the sheaves. We must go step by step," he added, as he turned away.

"Did you hear that?" cried old Mother Tonsard to the old Bonnebault woman; for the last words of the comte had been pronounced in a louder tone than the rest of his sentence, and it had fallen to the ears of one of the old women, who were posted in the road which ran along the fields.

"Yes, but that is not all; to-day a tooth, to-morrow an ear. If they could find a sauce, they would eat our livers as they do veal's," cried Bonnebault, who turned to the comte, as he was passing by, a menacing profile, but to which, in the wink of an eye, she had given a hypocritical expression by a mellow look and a sweet grimace; she hastened, at the same time, to make a low reverence.

"You are gleaning, too; you to whom my wife gives work, by which you can earn good money?"

"Ah, my dear lord, that God may grant you good health; but you see my boy eats everything up on me, and I am forced to hide the little bit of grain for bread in the winter. I will only pick up a little more—it will be a help!"

Accustomed to find in their gleaning a certain amount of grain, for which they searched in vain this time, the false as well as the true indigents, who had forgotten the pardon at Conches, expressed a deep discontent, which was urged on by Tonsard, Courtecuisse, Bonnebault, Laroche, Vaudoyer, Godain and their adherents in the tavern scene. It was worse still after the vintage; for the flow of Billingsgate did not commence until after the stripped vines had been examined by Sibilet with a remarkable rigor. This exasperated them to the last point; but when there exists so great a difference between the class which revolts and becomes incensed, and that which is menaced, words die and the discontented ones give themselves up to an underground labor, after the fashion of moles.

The Soulanges fair had passed in a very quiet manner, with the exception of a little bickering between the first and second society of the city, stirred up by the uneasy despotism of the queen, who could not tolerate the empire which had been established and founded by beautiful Euphemie Plissoud over the heart of the brilliant Lupin, whose fickle fancy she seemed to have fixed at last.

Neither the comte nor the comtesse had gone to the Soulanges fair or to the Tivoli fête, and this was laid up against them as a crime by the Soudrys, the Gaubertins and their adherents. It was pride, it was disdain, they exclaimed at Madame Soudry's. In the meantime the comtesse was trying to fill the void caused by Emile's absence by the great interest which pure souls take in the good they are doing, or think they are doing; and the comte, on his side, applied himself with no less zeal to material ameliorations in his territory; which should, according to him, modify in a favorable manner the position, and, equally, the character, of the inhabitants of that part of the country. Aided by the advice and the experience of Abbé Brossette, Madame de Montcornet learned little by little the exact statistics of the poor families in the district, their respective positions, their wants, their ways of living and the kind of self-help which it was best to bring to their aid in their labor, without making them careless or lazy. The comtesse had placed Geneviève Niseron, called la Péchina, in a convent

at Auxerre, under the pretext of having her taught sewing so that she could employ her, but in reality to save her from the infamous temptations of Nicolas Tonsard, whom Rigou had succeeded in saving from the conscription. The comtesse thought that a religious education, the cloister and a monastic watchfulness might subdue the ardent passions of this precocious little girl, whose mountain blood sometimes showed itself like a menacing flame, lending itself from afar to setting fire to the domestic happiness of her faithful Olympe Michaud.

Thus everything was quiet in the Chateau des Aigues. The comte, quieted by Sibilet, reassured by Michaud, congratulated himself on his firmness, thanking his wife for contributing by her benevolence to the general tranquillity. The question of the sale of the forest the general reserved for Paris, in a consultation with the lumber merchants. He had no idea of the manner in which the bargain should be made, and he was entirely ignorant of Gaubertin's influence on the court at Yonne, which supplied Paris very extensively.

XX.

THE GREYHOUND.

ABOUT the middle of the month of September, Emile Blondet, who had gone to Paris to publish a book, tired of Parisian life, returned to les Aigues, his mind full of the work which he had projected for the winter. At les Aigues, the friendly and candid young man of better days reappeared in this wornout journalist.

"What a beautiful soul!"

These were the comte and comtesse's words.

Men accustomed to rolling in the depths of a social nature, in understanding everything and suppressing nothing, make for themselves an oasis in their hearts; they forget their perversities and those of others; they become, in a narrow and reserved circle, little saints; they take upon themselves feminine delicacies; they give themselves up to a momentary realization of their ideal; they become angelic for the one person whom they adore, and they do not play at comedy; they make their hearts green again, as you might say; they need to brush the splashes of mud off them, to heal their wounds, to soothe their achings. To les Aigues Emile Blondet had come, without motive and almost without spirit. He pronounced no epigrams, he was as docile as a lamb, he took upon himself a suave platonism.

"He is such a good young man that I miss him when he is not here," said the general. "I wish that he had a fortune, and that he need not pass his life at Paris."

Never had the magnificent landscape and the park of les Aigues been so voluptuously beautiful as they were just then. In the first autumn days, at the moment when the earth, tired of its deliveries, relieved of its productions, exhales delicious vegetable perfumes, the forests are beyond all beautiful; they commence to take upon themselves those tints of sunburned green, the warm colors of Sienna clay, which composed the beautiful tapestry under which they hide, as if to defy the intense cold of winter.

Nature, after having shown herself gaudy and happy in spring, like a brunette who has hopes, becomes then melancholy and sweet like a blonde who has memories; the grass becomes golden, the autumn flowers show their pale petals, the marguerites pierce the lawns with their white eyes. Only violet flower-cups are seen. Yellow abounds; the shadows reflect fewer leaves and deeper tints; the sun, more oblique already, introduces into the orange and furtive lights long luminous traces, which disappear quickly, like the trailing robes of women who say "adieu."

The second day after his arrival, Emile stood at the window of his bedroom in the morning. This window opened on one of the terraces by a modern balcony, and before him spread a magnificent view of the surrounding country. The balcony extended the whole length of the comtesse's apartments, on that side which looked upon the forests and the country of Blangy. The pond, which would have been called a lake had les Aigues been a little nearer to Paris, could be seen slightly, as also the long canal.

Outside the park could be seen the villages and walls and vineyards of Blangy; some fields in which cattle were grazing; farms surrounded by hedges, with their fruit trees, walnut trees, and apple trees; and then, as a frame, the heights on which spread out by stages the beautiful forest trees. The comtesse had come out in her slippered feet to look after the flowers in her balcony, which were pouring forth their morning perfume. She had on a white morning wrapper, under which could be seen the rosy tints of her

pretty shoulders; a little coquettish cap was perched in mutinous fashion on her hair, which was blown around her face by the morning air; her wrapper fell around her, ungirdled, and opened to show an embroidered skirt.

"Ah! you are there?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What are you looking at?"

"What a question! You have torn me away from Nature. Tell me, comtesse, will you take a walk in the forests this morning?"

"What an idea! When you know that I look upon walking with horror."

"We will walk but very little. I will drive you in the tilbury. We will bring Joseph along, to watch it for us. You never set foot in your forests, and I remarked a singular phenomenon there; there are in some places a certain number of trees whose tops are the color of Florentine bronze, the leaves are dried."

"Well, I will go and dress myself."

"No, we will not get off in two hours then! Take a shawl, put a hat on, shoes; that is all that is necessary. I will go and tell them to harness."

"One must always do as you wish. I will return in a moment."

"General, we are going to take a walk; will you come?" said Blondet, going to waken the count, who grumbled like a man who is still enchained by sleep.

A quarter of an hour later, the tilbury rolled slowly over the park roadways, followed at a distance by a tall domestic in livery.

The morning was a typical September morning. The deep blue of the sky burst forth in spots in the midst of dappled clouds. The earth under cover was loath as a woman to rise; it exhaled suave and warm odors, but for all that wild ones; the odor of cultivation was mingled with the odor of the forests. The Angelus was ringing out from Blangy, and the sounds of the clock, mingling with the odd concert of the woods, gave harmony to the silence. Here and there were some rising vapors, white and diaphanous. Olympe had taken a notion to accompany her husband, who was going to give an order to one of the foresters whose house was not far away. The doctor of Soulanges had recommended her to walk, but not enough to fatigue her. She feared the heat of mid-day and did not care to go out in the evening. Michaud led his wife tenderly, and was followed by the dog he loved more than any other—a pretty greyhound, as gray as a mouse, marked with white spots, a gourmand, as are all greyhounds, full of faults like an animal who knew he was loved and could do as he pleased.

Thus, when the tilbury reached the gate, the comtesse, who asked how Madame Michaud was, knew that she had gone into the forest with her husband.

"This day seems to inspire everybody," said Blondet, as he drove his horse into one of the six avenues of the forest.

"By the way, Joseph, do you know the forests?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go ahead."

Now for the forest-drive! This avenue was one of the most delightful in the forest. It soon turned, and, becoming narrower, wound in and out among the trees. The sun shone down among the openings in the leafy roof, and the breeze brought upon its breath the perfume of thyme, lavender and wild mint, withered palm branches and leaves that sighed as they fell; the dew-drops, sown on the grass and the leaves, spattered all around them, as the light carriage sent them up in a spray. Indeed, it is a delightful thing to conduct a woman who, in the ups and downs of the gliding alleys, where the earth is thick with moss, pretends to be afraid or is really afraid, and cuddles up to you, and makes you feel an involuntary pressure, and who smiles so sweetly if you tell her that she prevents you from driving. The horse seemed to be in the secret of these interruptions; he looked to right and to left.

This new spectacle, this nature so vigorous in its effects, so little known and so grand, plunged her into a sweet reverie. She sank down in the tilbury and let herself drift into the pleasurable feeling of being near Emile. Her eyes were occupied; her heart spoke. She replied to this interior voice in harmony with her own. He also gazed at her by stealth, and he enjoyed this dreamy meditation, during which the ribbons of her bonnet were untied and freed to the morning wind the carefully curled golden tresses with a voluptuous abandonment. As they were going with no preconceived end, they suddenly came to a closed barrier. They had no key. They called to Joseph, but he had no key either.

"Well, let us walk, then. Joseph will take care of the tilbury. We will easily find him again."

Emile and the comtesse plunged into the forest, and they soon came upon a little clearing, such as are often met with in the forests. Twenty years before, the charcoal-burners had made their charcoal there, and the place had remained down-trodden; everything was burned away for

a considerable circumference. In twenty years, Nature had been able to make a flower-garden of it, a parterre for itself, as a painter one day gives himself the pleasure of painting a picture for himself.

This delightful flower basket was surrounded by fine old trees, whose tops fell down in vast fringes; they formed an immense canopy to this couch on which the goddess reposed. The charcoal burners had worn a path down to a running spring, in which the water was always pure. This path was still visible. It invited you to descend by a coquettish turning, and all at once it stopped abruptly; it showed you a close piece of variegated work from which a thousand roots hung in the air shaped into tapestry. This hidden pool is bordered by a grass plot. There were a few poplars, some willows, which protected by their light shade the grassy seat, evidently the work of some meditative or lazy charcoal burner. The frogs leaped around fearlessly, the teal bathed, the water-birds came and went, and a hare ran away, and you remained master of this charming bath, ornamented with wild rushes in glorious profusion. Over your head the trees grew in strange shapes; here, trunks branched down like boa-constrictors; there, beech-trees straight as Grecian columns rose. A tench showed you his snout, the squirrel gazed at you. At last, when the comtesse and Emile had seated themselves, as they were fatigued, a bird, I do not know which, sent forth an autumn song, a song of adieu, that all the birds listened to—one of those songs filled with love, and which is heard by all our senses at the same time.

"What a silence!" said the comtesse, in an agitated low tone of voice, as though not to disturb this peace.

They looked at the green spots on the surface of the water, which are the worlds in which life is begotten; they showed each other the lizard, lazily enjoying the warm sun rays, and flying away at their approach, by which conduct it has merited the name of man's friend. "It proves thus how well it knows man!" Emile had said. They pointed out the frogs, who, more confident, returned betwixt earth and water on the beds of water cresses, and winked their carbuncle eyes. The simple and sweet poetry of Nature filtered through these blasé hearts and filled them with a contemplative emotion; when, all at once, Blondet trembled, and leaning toward the comtesse, said:

"Listen."

"To what?"

"To that strange noise."

"This is indeed a specimen of a literary man, who knows nothing of the country. It is a woodpecker who is working it at his hole. I wager that you do not even know the most curious trait of this bird's story. As soon as he has given a blow with his beak—and he gives thousands to pierce an oak twice as thick as your body—he goes back to see if he has pierced the tree, and he goes back every minute."

"This noise, dear teacher of natural history, is not a noise made by an animal; there is in it I know not what note of intelligence, which speaks of man."

The comtesse was seized with a panic of fear. She flew from her flower-basket in retaking her road, and wanted to leave the forest.

"What is the matter with you?" cried Blondet, uneasily, running after her.

"It seemed to me that I saw eyes," she said, when she had regained one of the paths by which they had come to the charcoal-pit.

At that moment they heard the dull agonizing cry of a creature suddenly throttled, and the comtesse, whose fear was redoubled, fled so quickly that Blondet could hardly follow her. She ran, she ran like a will-o'-the-wisp. She did not hear Emile, who cried out after her: "You are mistaken." She ran all the faster. Blondet succeeded in catching up to her, and they continued running further and further. At last they came upon Michaud and his wife, who were walking along arm in arm. Emile was panting, the comtesse breathless, and it was some time before they could speak and explain their strange behavior. Michaud joined Emile in making light of the comtesse's terror, and the forester put the two strollers in the right road to regain the tilbury. On reaching the gate, Madame Michaud called out:

"Prince!"

"Prince! Prince!" cried the forester.

And he whistled and whistled; but no greyhound answered.

Emile spoke of the strange noise which had been the commencement of their adventure.

"My wife heard that noise," said Michaud, "and I made fun of her."

"They have killed Prince," cried the comtesse; "I am sure of it now; and they killed him by cutting his throat with one stroke, for what I heard was the last sigh of a dying beast."

"The devil!" said Michaud; "the thing is worth looking into."

Emile and the forester left the two

ladies with Joseph, and took their way to the natural grove formed on the old charcoal pit. They descended to the pond; they climbed the declivity, but found no indications of anything out of the way. Blondet had gone up first. He saw among a clump of trees the high top of one of those trees with dried leaves. He showed it to Michaud, and he proposed to go and find it. Both started out in a straight line across the forest, avoiding the trunks, turning back the bushes and briars, and at last finding the tree.

"It is a fine oak!" said Michaud; "but it is the work of a worm. A worm has made a circuit of the bark at its base."

And he stopped, took hold of the bark and raised it.

"Look, what an immense labor."

"You have a great many worms in your forest," said Blondet.

At that moment Michaud saw some red spots not far from him, and a little further on the head of his greyhound. He heaved a sigh: "The blackguards. Madame was right."

Blondet and Michaud went to look at the body, and found that, as Madame la Comtesse had said, they had cut Prince's throat, and to prevent him from barking they had baited him with a piece of salt pork, which he still held between his tongue and the roof of his mouth.

"Poor beast, his thieving has been the cause of his death."

"Exactly like a prince," replied Blondet.

"Some one has fled from here, not wanting to be surprised by us," said Michaud, "and who was consequently doing a wicked act; but I see no signs of branches nor cut trees."

Blondet and the forester commenced searching the place carefully, closely examining every track. A few steps away, Blondet pointed out a tree before which the grass had been piled, trampled upon, and two hollows were seen.

"Some one has been kneeling here, and it was a woman; because a man's legs would not leave so great a quantity of grass between the two knees, and here is the print of the skirt."

The forester, after carefully examining the foot of the tree, came across the marks of the commenced hole, but he failed to find this worm, with thick, shining, rough skins, bristling with little brown points, ending in a tail which already resembled that of a May-bug, and whose head was armed with horns and two hooks with which it pierced through the roots.

"My dear fellow, I now understand the reason for the large number of dead trees which I remarked upon this morning as I stood on the terrace in front of the chateau, and which made me come here hunting for the cause. The worms work well, but it is your peasants who come out of the woods."

The forester let a great oath escape him, and he ran, followed by Blondet, to rejoin the comtesse, and begged of her to take his wife home with her. He took Joseph's horse, the latter returning on foot to the chateau, and he disappeared rapidly to intercept the woman who had killed his dog, and to surprise her with the blood-stained hedging bill and the instrument with which she had made the incisions in the trunk. Blondet seated himself between the comtesse and Madame Michaud, and related Prince's sad end to them and the discovery which had come from it.

"Mon Dieu! let us tell the general before he has breakfasted, otherwise he will die of anger," cried the comtesse.

"I will prepare him," said Blondet.

"They have killed the dog," exclaimed Olympe, wiping away her tears.

"You must have loved the poor greyhound, my dear," said the comtesse, "to make you cry like that."

"I can only think of Prince with sad foreboding. I tremble for my husband's safety."

"How they have spoiled this morning for us," said the comtesse with an adorable pout.

"How they are ruining the country," replied the young wife sadly.

They found the general waiting for them at the gate.

"From whence do you come?" he asked.

"You will know," replied Blondet with a mysterious air, as he helped Madame Michaud to descend, whose sad looks struck the comte.

An instant later, the general and Blondet were walking up and down the terrace.

"You have sufficient moral courage to listen to what I have to say without giving way to passion, have you not?"

"I cannot tell," replied the general; "but go on, finish what you have to say, or I will begin to think that you are making fun of me."

"Do you see those dead trees?"

"Yes."

"And those which look so faded?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, as many dead trees as you see, so many are killed by the peas-

ants, whom you thought you had won over by your kindness."

And then Blondet related the adventures of the morning.

The general became so pale that he frightened Blondet.

"Swear! Get angry! Your repression will do you more harm than an outburst of anger."

"I am going to smoke!" said the comte, as he turned toward his kiosk.

During breakfast, Michaud returned; he had not met any one. Sibilet, sent for by the comte, arrived at the same time.

"Monsieur Sibilet, and you also, Monsieur Michaud, let it be known throughout the country that I will give one thousand francs to any one who seizes in 'flagrante delicto' those who are thus killing my trees. You must find out what kind of tools they use, where they are bought—and I have a plan."

"These people never sell each other," said Sibilet, "when there are crimes committed which profit them and are premeditated; for all they need do, is to deny this diabolical invention and say that it was no plan or work of theirs."

"Yes," said the general, "but a thousand francs means two or three acres of ground to them."

"We will try," remarked Sibilet. "For fifteen hundred I will answer to find a traitor, especially if we keep his secret."

"But we must act as though we knew nothing; I especially. It would be better that you pretend to have found this out unknown to me. We must mistrust these people as we would the enemy in time of war."

"But they are the enemy!" said Blondet.

Sibilet cast a look upon the young man which spoke louder than words; then he went out.

"I do not like that Sibilet," said Blondet, when he had heard him leaving the house; "he is not honest."

"Up to the present time I can find nothing against him," replied the general.

Blondet retired to write some letters. He had lost the thoughtless gayety of his first visit; he was uneasy and preoccupied. He did not have the same presentiments Madame Michaud had; it was more a foreseen and certain feeling of unhappiness. He said to himself:

"All this will end badly; and if the general does not take a decisive step and give up the battle in which he is crushed by superior numbers, there will be many victims. Who knows if he will come out of it whole and safe, he and his wife? Mon Dieu, this adorable, this devoted, this perfect woman, thus exposed! And he thinks he loves her! Well, I shall share their perils, and if I cannot save them, I shall perish with them."

XXI.

COUNTRY VIRTUES.

THAT night Marie Tonsard was on the road leading to Soulanges. Seated on the edge of a culvert, she was waiting for Bonnebault, who had, as usual, passed the day at the café. She heard him coming in the distance, and his steps indicated that he was drunk. She knew that he had lost at cards, for he always sang when he had won.

"Is that you, Bonnebault?"

"Yes, little one."

"What is the matter with you?"

"I owe twenty-five francs, and they can wring my neck twenty-five times before I can find the money."

"Well, we can have five hundred," she whispered in his ear.

"Oh! it is a question of killing somebody, but I had rather live."

"Keep quiet! Vaudoyer will give them to us if you will put him in the way of catching your mother working at one of the trees."

"I would rather kill a man than sell my mother. You have your grandmother, old woman Tonsard; why do you not deliver her up?"

"If I were to attempt it, my father would get angry; and then he would prevent the little comedy from being played."

"That is true. But it matters not; my mother shall not go to prison. Poor old woman! She bakes my bread, she finds me my clothes, I do not know how. Go to prison! And through me! I would have neither heart nor bowels! No, no. And for fear that she may be sold, I will tell her to-night not to circle any more trees."

"Very well, then, my father will do as he pleases. I will tell him there are five hundred francs to be gained, and he can ask my grandmother if she is willing. They would never put an old woman of seventy in prison. Besides, she will be a great deal better placed there than in her garret."

"Five hundred francs! I will speak to my mother," said Bonnebault. "Indeed, if she will arrange to give them to me, I will leave her something upon which to live in prison. She will spin, she will amuse herself; she will be well fed, well sheltered, and she will have much less care than at Conches. Tomorrow, little one— I have no time to talk with you now."

The next day, at five in the morning, just at daybreak, Bonnebault and his mother knocked on the door of the Grand-I-vert. Old Mother Tonsard was the only one up.

"Marie," cried Bonnebault, "the business is done."

"Is it about the trees yesterday?" said Tonsard's mother. "Everything is arranged. I am to be taken."

"*Par exemple!* my boy has the promise of an acre of ground for that price, from Monsieur Rigou."

The two old women commenced to dispute as to who should be sold for the benefit of their children. The noise of the quarrel awakened the rest of the household.

Tonsard and Bonnebault each took sides with their respective mothers.

"Let us draw straws," said Madame Tonsard, the son's wife.

The short straw decided in favor of the tavern. Three days afterward, at daybreak, the gendarmes led from out the depths of the forest at Ville-aux-Fayes old woman Tonsard, taken, by the head forester and his assistants, in the act of destroying the trees, with a wicked-looking file, which served the purpose of tearing the tree, and a hammer, with which the delinquent stretched the circular crossline, as the insect stretched his pathway. They stated, in the verbal process, the existence of this perfidious operation upon sixty trees within a radius of five hundred feet. The old woman Tonsard was transferred to Auxerre, and the case was turned over to the jurisdiction of the court of assizes.

When Michaud saw the old woman at the foot of the tree, he could not help saying:

"Here are the kind of people upon whom Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse expend their benefits! By my faith, if madame will listen to me, she will not give a *dot* to the little Tonsard; she is less worthy of it than her grandmother even."

The old woman raised her gray eyes to Michaud, and cast a venomous look at him. And truly, in learning who was the author of the crime, the comte forbade his wife to give anything to Catherine Tonsard.

"Monsieur le Comte would do much better," said Sibilet, "had he known, as I knew, that Godain had bought that field three days before Catherine came to speak to madame. Thus these two people had counted upon the effect that this scene would have upon madame's compassion. Catherine is entirely capable of having herself put in the condition in which she is to have a motive in asking for that sum of money; for Godain counts for nothing in the affair."

"What people!" said Blondet. "The wicked ones of Paris are saints compared to them—"

"Ah, monsieur," said Sibilet, interrupting him, "interest will make people commit crimes everywhere. Do you know who betrayed old woman Tonsard?"

"No!"

"Her granddaughter, Marie. She was jealous of her sister's marriage, and in order to establish herself—"

"This is frightful!" exclaimed the comte. "But will they not kill her for it?"

"Oh!" replied Sibilet, "that is nothing to fear; they hold life so lightly, these people! They are so tired of always working. Ah! monsieur, such dreadful things do not happen in the country as in Paris; but then you will not believe it?"

"Let us try to be good and charitable!" said the comtesse.

The evening following the arrest, Bonnebault came to the Grand-I-vert tavern, where the whole Tonsard family were holding high revelry.

"Yes, yes, rejoice! I have just learned from Vaudoyer that, to punish you, the comtesse has withdrawn the thousand francs she had promised to Godain; her husband will not allow her to give the money."

"It was Michaud, the blackguard, who advised him," said Tonsard. "My mother heard him. She told me so at Ville-aux-Fayes, when I went to take her some money and some clothes. Well, let them keep their money; our five hundred francs will help toward paying for Godain's ground, and we will be revenged, Godain and I. Ah! Michaud has meddled in our affairs. That will do him more evil than good. What harm would that money to Godain do him, I ask you? It is he, however, who is the author of all this rumpus. It is true that he discovered the spot the day on which my mother cut his dog's throat. And if

I were to meddle in the business of the chateau! If I were to tell the comte that his wife was walking in the forests with a young man, with no fear of the dew. You must have warm feet for that."

"The general! the general!" cried Courtecuisse; "they can do as they please with him. But it is Michaud who shows him the way. He is a mischief maker who knows nothing of his trade. In my time everything was different."

"Oh!" said Tonsard, "that was a good time for all of us; was it not, Vaudoyer?"

"The fact of the matter is," replied the latter, "that if Michaud was out of the way we would be unmolested."

"Enough said," cried Tonsard. "We will talk of this later, by the light of the moon, in the open fields."

Near the end of October the comtesse had gone away and left the general at les Aigues. He was not to join her until much later. She did not want to lose the first play at the Theatre Italien. She, nevertheless, found herself alone and wearied. She no longer had Emile's society, which had helped her to while away the moments which the general gave to his business or in riding about the country.

November was a true winter month, somber and gray, half frost and half thaw, intermingled with snow and rain. The old Tonsard woman's case had necessitated a journey to the witnesses, and Michaud had gone to testify. Monsieur Rigou was seized with a great pity for this old woman. He had provided her with a lawyer, who was to argue her case for her on the sole testimony of interested witnesses and the absence of all non-interested witnesses. But the testimony of Monsieur Michaud and his assistants, corroborated by that of the two gendarmes, had decided the question. Tonsard's mother was sentenced to five years in prison, and the lawyer, turning to her son, said:

"She owes that to Michaud's testimony!"

XXII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

One Saturday evening Courtecuisse, Bonnebault, Godain, Tonsard, his daughters, his wife, Father Fourchon, Vaudoyer, and several of the other conspirators were taking supper in the tavern. The moon was half full, and there had been a hard frost, which had dried up the ground; the first snow of the season had melted.

Thus the footsteps of a man left no traces behind them by means of which he could be tracked. They were eating a ragout made of rabbits. They laughed and they drank. It was the day after Godain's marriage, and they were going to escort him to his new home. His house was not far from that of Courtecuisse. When Rigou sold an acre of ground it was isolated and near the forest. Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer had their guns with them. The whole country-side was sleeping; not a light was to be seen. Just then Bonnebault's mother came in.

"The wife," she said, whispering to Tonsard and her son, "is about to be confined. He has just harnessed his horse, and is going to fetch Dr. Gourdon from Soulanges."

"Sit you down there, mother," said Tonsard to her, giving up his place at the table to her and going to lie down on a bench himself.

At that moment the noise of a horse in full gallop was heard passing rapidly down the road.

Tonsard, Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer went out quickly and saw Michaud going through the village.

"How well he knows his business," said Courtecuisse. "He has gone down the street, turned toward Blangy, and taken the high-road; that is the safest."

"Yes," remarked Tonsard, "but he will bring Monsieur Gourdon back with him."

"He will not find him, perhaps," objected Courtecuisse. "They are expecting the new postmaster at Conches. Everything is upset by him."

"But then he will take the road from Soulanges to Conches, and that is much shorter."

"And it is the safest for us," said Courtecuisse. "There is bright moonlight on the high-road just now. There are no guards, as there are in the forests, they can hear so far away; and there are no guard-houses; and there behind the hedges, just at the commencement of the small forest, you can draw on your man from behind, as upon a rabbit, at five hundred feet."

"It will be half past eleven when he passes by there," said Tonsard. "It will take him half an hour to get to Soulanges

and as much more to come back. Oh! if Monsieur Gourdon is only away from home."

"Do not worry yourself," said Courtecuisse. "I shall be ten minutes away from you, on the road to the right of Blangy, facing Soulanges; Vaudoyer shall be ten minutes from you, facing Conches, and if any one comes, a post carriage, the mail, the soldiers, or whoever it may be, we will fire into the earth a smothered shot."

"And if I miss?"

"He is right," replied Courtecuisse. "I am a better shot than you are. Vaudoyer, I will go with you; Bonnebault will replace me. He will utter a shrill cry; because that will be heard better and be less suspicious."

All three re-entered the tavern. The wedding continued. At eleven o'clock, Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard and Bonnebault went out, taking their guns with them, and not one of the women paid any attention to them. They returned, however, three quarters of an hour later and commenced to drink, which they kept up until one o'clock in the morning. Tonsard's two daughters, their mother and Bonnebault had given the miller, the mowers and the two peasants, as well as Fourchon, so much to drink that they had fallen to the floor, when the four conspirators had set out. On their return, they shook the sleepers, whom they found still in the same places.

While this orgie was being enacted, Michaud's household was in the greatest disorder. Olympe's sickness had been premature, and her husband, thinking that she was about to be confined, had set out in great haste. But the poor woman's pains became quiet almost as soon as Michaud had started; for her mind was so preoccupied with the dangers which surrounded her husband at this late hour, in a country at enmity with him, and overrun with such determined rascals, that this agony of mind was powerful enough to kill and dominate for the moment her physical sufferings. Her servant tried to reassure her, by telling her that her fears were imaginary. She did not seem to understand what she was saying, and remained crouched over the fire in her own room, listening intently to every sound out doors; and in her terror, which became greater every moment, she had roused the man servant, with the intention of giving him an order which she did not give after all.

The poor woman came and went in a feverish agitation. She opened her windows and looked out of them, in spite of the cold; she descended the stairs and opened the door leading to the courtyard; she looked out into the night and listened:

"Nothing—always nothing!" she said.

She climbed up the stairs again, in despair.

At about a quarter past twelve she cried:

"Here he is, I hear his horse!"

She went downstairs, followed by the servant, who started to open the gate.

"It is singular," she said; "he is coming back by way of the forest—from Conches!"

Then she stopped as if struck with horror, motionless, voiceless. The domestic shared this fright; for there was something in the furious gallop of the horse and in the clanking of his empty stirrups which rang out, I cannot explain what premonition of evil, accompanied by those significant neighings which horses give utterance to when they are alone. Soon—too soon for the unhappy woman—the horse reached the gate, breathless and covered with sweat, but alone; he had broken his bridle, by which he had evidently been fastened.

With haggard eyes Olympe watched the servant opening the gate; she saw the horse come in, and without saying a word she started like a crazy woman to run to the chateau. She reached it, and, falling under the general's windows, she cried out:

"Monsieur, they have assassinated him!"

This cry was so terrible that it awakened the comte. He rang and roused all the household. The groans of poor Madame Michaud, who had given birth to a dead child, drew the general and his servants to the spot. They lifted the unhappy woman, who was dying. She expired, saying to the general:

"They have killed him!"

"Joseph," called the comte to his valet, "go find a doctor! Perhaps there is still some hope. No, rather ask Monsieur le Curé to come; for this poor woman is really dead, and her child also. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! how lucky it is that my wife is not here! And you," he said, turning to the gardener, "go and see what has happened."

"What has happened," said Michaud's servant, "is that Monsieur Michaud's horse has come home alone, the harness broken and his limbs bleeding. There is blood upon the saddle."

"What has been done this night?"

said the comte. "Go and waken Groison, call the guards, and have the horses saddled. We will go and search the country-side."

At daybreak, eight persons—the comte, Groison, the three guards, the marshal, and two gendarmes who had come from Soulanges with him—set out to explore the country. They found, about the middle of the day, the body of the head forester, in a clump of trees between the high-road and the road to Ville-aux-Fayes, at the end of the park of les Aigues, and five hundred feet from the Conches gate. Two gendarmes set out, one for Ville-aux-Fayes, to bring the king's deputy, the other for Soulanges, to get the justice of the peace. Awaiting their arrival, the general made a survey of the ground, assisted by the marshal. They found on the road the prints made by the horse's pawing, and the heavy marks of the gallop of a frightened horse as far as the first forest path beyond the hedge. The horse, unguided, had taken his own way from there. Michaud's hat was found in this path. To return to his stable, the horse had taken the shortest road. Michaud was shot in the back. The vertebral column was broken.

Groison and the marshal examined, with a remarkable sagacity, the ground around the traces of the pawing, which indicated what they call in judicial style "the theater of the crime"; but they could discover no clew. The earth was too frozen to retain the prints of the feet of those who had killed Michaud; they only found the paper of a cartridge. When the king's deputy, the judge and Monsieur Gourdon arrived to take away the body and make an autopsy, it was decided that the ball, which coincided with the debris of the wadding, was a ball from an ammunition gun, fired from an ammunition gun, and that there was not one of those guns in existence in the district of Blangy. The judge, and Monsieur Soudray, the king's deputy, that evening at the chateau, agreed to gather together all the evidence and then wait. This was also the advice of the marshal and the lieutenant of the Ville-aux-Fayes gendarmerie.

"It is impossible that this could be a blow agreed upon by all the country people," said the marshal; "but there are two districts, Blangy and Conches, and there are in each five or six people capable of having struck the blow. The one I suspect the most, Tonsard, passed the night guzzling; but your deputy, my dear general, was at the wedding feast; Langlumé, your miller, never left them. They were so drunk they could not stand up; and they escorted the newly-married couple to their home about half-past one; and the horse's arrival proclaims the fact that Michaud was assassinated between eleven o'clock and midnight. At a quarter past ten, Groison had seen the entire wedding party seated at the table, and Monsieur Michaud had passed by there to go to Soulanges, from whence he had returned at eleven o'clock. His horse had become refractory between the guardhouses and the road; but he might have been shot at Blangy, and have kept his seat for some time longer. You must swear out warrants against twenty people at least; arrest all the suspects. But these gentlemen know the peasants as I know them. You will keep them in prison for a year, and will get nothing but denials. What are you going to do with all those who were at Tonsard's?"

They called Langlumé, the miller, and the deputy of the General de Montcornet, who told briefly his story of the evening.

They were all in the tavern. None had gone out except for a few moments in the courtyard. That was in company with Tonsard about eleven o'clock. They had talked about the moonlight and the weather; but had heard no sounds. They named all the guests; not one of them had left the tavern. About two o'clock the company conducted the newly-married couple to their house.

The general agreed with the marshal, the lieutenant and the king's deputy to send to Paris for a skillful detective, who would come to the chateau as a workman, and who would conduct himself in such a manner as to be dismissed. He would drink and become a constant visitor at the Grand-I-vert, and would remain in the country, grumbling against the general. It was the best plan to follow by which to watch an indiscretion and to catch a robber.

"If it costs me twenty thousand francs, I will end by discovering the murderer of my dear Michaud," the general was never tired of repeating.

He set out with this idea and returned from Paris, in the month of January, with one of the most skillful detectives of the secret service, who installed himself, so to say, to direct the work, and who took to poaching. They served a verbal process against him; the general put him out doors, and returned to Paris in the month of February.

XXIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE VANQUISHED.

In the month of May, when the good weather had come, and the Parisians had returned to les Aigues, one evening Monsieur de Troisville, whom his daughter had brought home with her, Blondet, the Abbé Brossette, the general, the sous-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes, who was visiting at the chateau, were playing, some of them whist, the others checkers. It was about half past eleven o'clock. Joseph came in to say to his master that the drunken workman whom he had discharged wished to speak to him; he pretended that the general still owed him some money. He was, the valet said, very tipsy.

"Well, I will go and see him."

And the general went out on the terrace some distance from the chateau.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the detective, "you will never get anything out of these people; all that I can find out is, that if you continue to remain in the country and try to make the inhabitants give up the customs which Mademoiselle Laguerre allowed them to fall into, they will shoot you too. Besides, there is nothing more for me to do here; they mistrust me more than they do your guards."

The count paid the spy, who left, and whose departure justified the suspicions of the accomplices of Michaud's death. When the general entered the salon to rejoin his family and his guests, there remained on his face traces of so vivid and deep an emotion that his wife, becoming uneasy, came to him to ask him what he had just heard.

"Chère Annie, I do not wish to frighten thee, and yet it is right that thou shouldst learn that Michaud's death was an indirect advice which was given to us to leave the country."

"As for me," said Monsieur de Troisville, "I would not leave it. I had the same difficulties in Normandy, but under another form, and I persisted in remaining. Now everything goes along smoothly."

"Monsieur le Marquis," said the sous-prefect, "Normandy and Burgundy are two very different countries. The fruit of the vine makes hotter blood than that of the apple trees. We do not know the laws and their consequences so well, and we are surrounded by forests. Industry has not tamed us yet; we are still savages. If I dare give the comte any advice, it would be to sell his ground and to put his money out at interest. He would so double his income, and would not have the slightest care with it all. If he loves the country, he could have, in the neighborhood of Paris, a chateau with a park, inclosed by a wall, as beautiful as this one of les Aigues, where nobody would ever disturb him; and which would only have farms attached to it rented to people who would come in their carriages, and pay their rent in bank notes, and who would not necessitate us serving a single verbal process during the year. He could go and return inside of four hours. And Monsieur Blondet and Monsieur le Marquis would not miss Madame la Comtesse so often."

"I retreat before the peasants, when I did not even retreat before the Danube!"

"Yes, but where are your cuirassiers?" asked Blondet.

"Such a beautiful country!"

"It must be worth more than two millions to-day!"

"The chateau alone must have cost that," said Monsieur de Troisville.

"One of the finest estates within a radius of twenty miles!" said the sous-préfect; "but you will find better ones in the neighborhood of Paris!"

"What is the income from two millions?" asked the comtesse.

"To-day, about eighty thousand francs," replied Blondet.

"The les Aigues does not bring in more than thirty thousand francs income," said the comtesse; "and then you have been under great expense these last few years; you have surrounded the forests with ditches."

"There is," said Blondet, "a royal chateau, that can be bought for four hundred thousand francs to-day, in the neighborhood of Paris. You can buy the follies of others."

"I thought that you wanted to live at les Aigues?" said the comte to his wife.

"Do you not think that I am a thousand times more anxious about your life?" she said. "Besides, since the death of my poor Olympe and Michaud's assassination this country has become odious to me. All the faces which I meet seem sinister and menacing to me."

The next evening, in Monsieur Gaubertin's salon, at Ville-aux-Fayes, the sous-prefect was greeted by this phrase, which the mayor called out to him:

"Well, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, do you come from les Aigues?"

"Yes," replied the sous-prefect, with a little air of triumph, and casting a tender glance upon Mademoiselle Elise,

"I am very much afraid that we shall lose the general. He is going to sell his property."

"Monsieur Gaubertin, I leave my pavilion in your care. I cannot stand this noise any longer, nor the dust of Villeaux-Fayes. I am like an imprisoned bird: I long for the air of the fields, the breath of the forests," said Madame Isaure, in a languorous voice, her eyes half closed, her head leaning toward her left shoulder, and nonchalantly twisting her long blonde curls.

"Be quiet, madame," said Gaubertin to her in a whisper; "it is not by your indiscretions that I will buy the pavilion."

Then, turning toward the sous-prefect:

"They have never discovered the personality of the assassins of the forester?" he asked him.

"It seems not," replied the sous-prefect.

"That will do much harm to the sale of les Aigues," said Gaubertin in a loud voice, so as to be heard by his guests. "I know very well that I will not buy any of it. The country people are too wicked. Even in Mademoiselle Laguerre's time I quarreled with them, and God only knows how she let them have their own way."

Nothing indicated, toward the end of May, that the general had any intention of selling les Aigues. He was still undecided. One evening, about six o'clock, he entered the forest by one of the six avenues which led to the pavilion. He had dismissed his guard, as he found himself so near the chateau. At a turn in the pathway a man, armed with a gun, came out from the bushes.

"General," he said, "this is the third time that you have been in front of my fowling-piece, and this is the third time that I have given you your life."

"Why do you wish to kill me, Bonnebault?" said the comte, without betraying the slightest emotion.

"By my faith, if it was not by me, it would be by another; and as for me, I like the men who served under the Emperor, and I could not make up my mind to kill you like a partridge. Do not question me, I don't want to say anything. But you have some very powerful enemies, much more tricky than you are, and who will finish by crushing you. I will receive a thousand francs if I kill you, and I will marry Marie Tonsard. Give me a few acres of ground and a small hut. I will continue to say, what I have said all along, that I have not yet found the occasion. You will have time to sell your ground and go away from here; but hurry up. I am still an honest fellow, bad subject and all that I am; another might do you some harm."

"And if I give you what you ask, will you tell me the name of the person who promised you the thousand francs?" asked the general.

"I do not know it; and the person who is urging me on to that point I love too much to name to you. And after all, when you know it is Marie Tonsard, that will not do you much good; Marie Tonsard will be as mute as a wall, and as for me, I should deny having told you."

"Come and see me to-morrow," said the general.

"This is sufficient," said Bonnebault; "but if they find me awkward, I will warn you."

Eight days after this strange conversation, the whole district, the department and Paris was posted with enormous posters, announcing the sale of les Aigues in lots, in the office of Master Corbineau, notary of Soulanges. All the lots were bid in by Rigou, and rose to the sum of two million five hundred thousand francs. The next day Rigou changed the names: Monsieur Gaubertin had the forests, Rigou and the Soudrys the vineyards and the other lots. The chateau and the park were sold again, with the exception of the pavilion and its surroundings, which Monsieur Gaubertin reserved, in honor of his practical and sentimental spouse.

Several years after these events, during the winter of 1837, one of the most remarkable political writers of the day, Emile Blondet, reached the last stage of poverty, which he had hidden until then under the outside show of a life of reckless opulence. He hesitated in taking a desperate step, seeing that his work, his mind, his learning, his knowledge of affairs, had led to nothing better than to slave like a mechanic to the profit of others, in seeing all the good places taken, in feeling himself arrived at a mature age, without position and without fortune; in perceiving sots and silly bourgeois replacing the court people and the incapables of the Restoration, and the Government being reconstructed as it was in 1830. One evening, when he was on the verge of suicide, throwing a backward glance over his deplorable existence, calumniated and overburdened with work, more than with the orgies with which they reproached him, he saw the figure of a noble and beauti-

ful woman, as one often sees a statue standing whole and pure in the midst of the saddest ruins. As this image filled his brain, his porter knocked at his door and handed him a letter, sealed in black, in which the Comtesse de Montcornet announced the death of the general, who had gone back to active service and commanded a division. She was his heir; she had no children. The letter, though dignified, indicated to Blondet that the woman of forty years, whom he had loved when young, offered him a fraternal hand and a considerable fortune. Some days after the marriage, the Comtesse de Montcornet and Monsieur Blondet—who had been made prefect — in order to reach the prefecture, had taken the route which passed through what was formerly les Aigues, and stopped at the spot where the two pavilions had formerly stood, wishing to visit the village and country of Blangy, peopled with such sweet remembrances to both the travelers.

The mysterious forests, the avenues leading to the park, had all been done away with; the country resembled a tailor's sample board. The peasants had taken possession of the earth, as conquered and conqueror. They had already subdivided it into more than a thousand lots, and the population had tripled between Conches and Blangy. The cultivation of this beautiful park, so cared for, so luxuriant formerly, had released the pretty pavilion, which had become the villa "Il Buen Retiro" of Lady Isaure Gaubertin. This was the only building left standing, and which dominated the landscape, or, better still, the trivial, petty cultivation replacing the landscape. This construction looked like a chateau, so miserable were the little houses built all around it, in the fashion of peasants' dwellings.

"This is progress!" cried Emile. "It is a page taken from the 'Contract Social' of Jean-Jacques! And I, I am harnessed to the social machine which works thus! Mon Dieu! what will become of the kings in a little while? But what will become, in this condition of things, of the nations themselves in fifty years?"

"You love me, you are beside me. I find the present very beautiful, and I care not for a future so far distant," replied his wife.

"Near thee, long live the present!" gayly cried the enamored Blondet, "and to the devil with the future!"

Then he signed to the coachman to drive on, and as the horses set forth in a galop, the newly-married couple retook the course of their honeymoon.

END OF VOLUME THREE.

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